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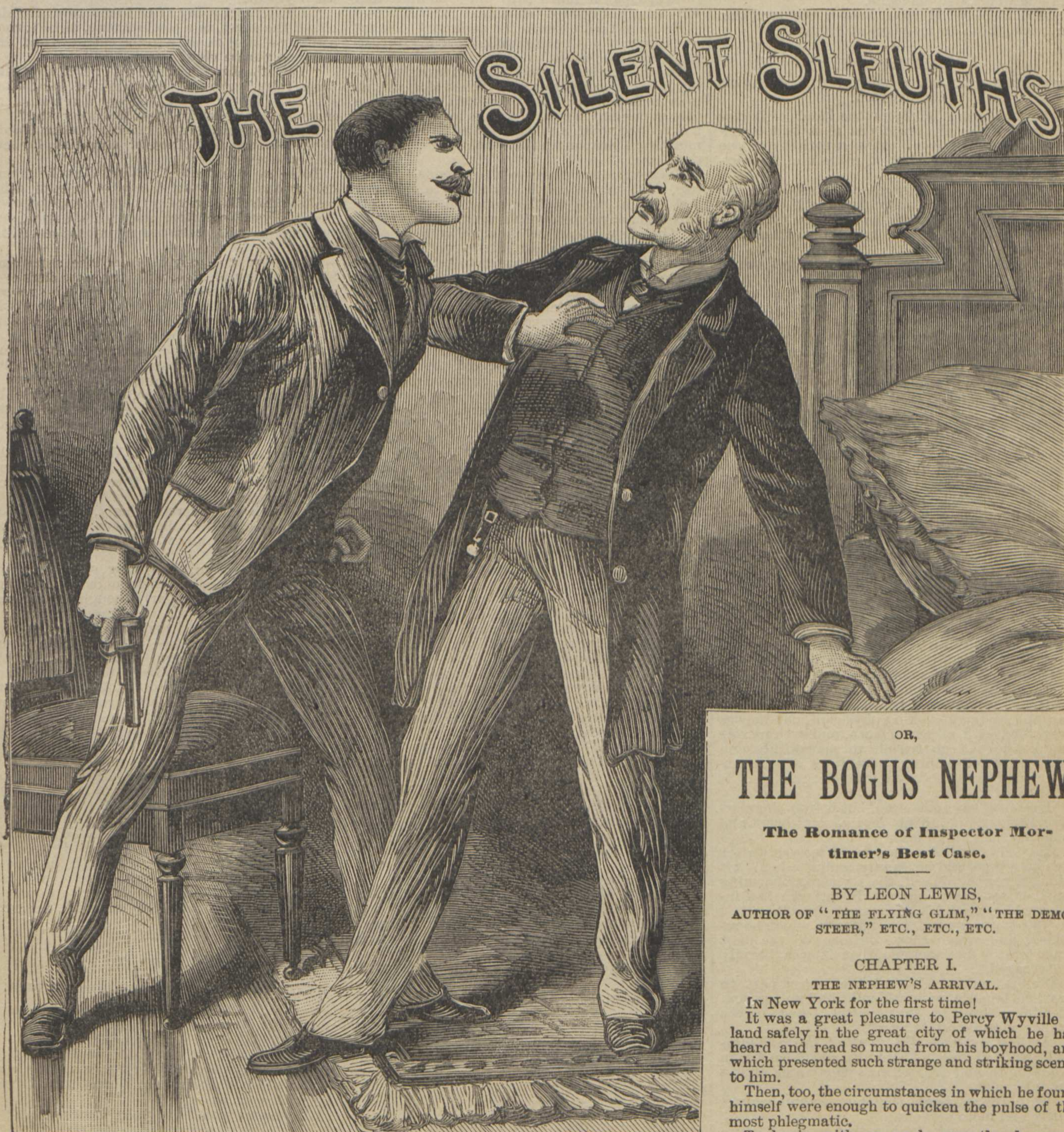
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OR,

THE BOGUS NEPHEW.

The Romance of Inspector Mor-
timer's Best Case.

BY LEON LEWIS,
AUTHOR OF "THE FLYING GLIM," "THE DEMON
STEER," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEPHEW'S ARRIVAL.

IN New York for the first time!

It was a great pleasure to Percy Wyville to land safely in the great city of which he had heard and read so much from his boyhood, and which presented such strange and striking scenes to him.

Then, too, the circumstances in which he found himself were enough to quicken the pulse of the most phlegmatic.

To begin with, an uncle recently deceased, Claude Wyville, had left him, in the care of another uncle, Dr. John Wyville, a million and a half of dollars.

"IF I AM NOT YOUR NEPHEW, PERCY WYVILLE," HE ADDED, "IT IS SIMPLY BECAUSE PERCY WYVILLE WAS MURDERED LAST NIGHT IN WEEHAWKEN!" DR. WYVILLE RECOILED AS IF A DAGGER HAD BEEN THRUST INTO HIS VITALS.

Not a bad send-off for a young fellow just out of college and barely one-and-twenty.

In the second place, he expected to meet an heiress, the only child of the late Claude Wyville's partner, Reuben Hanson, a girl of rare beauty and spirit, with whom he had long been in correspondence, and whom he had seen often during a couple of seasons she had passed at the old home of the Wyvilles and Hansons, "way down East, a couple of bunks below Kennebunk," as jolly old Rube Hanson, ship-master as well as ship-owner, had been in the habit of saying.

And finally, Percy did not have the least doubt of being received almost as a son and brother by Dr. John and his daughter, to judge by the letters the doctor had sent him.

The only drawback to his happiness, as he took his way to a leading hotel, was the fact that Dr. John and his daughter lived in Philadelphia, and consequently were not in a position to meet him as he landed in New York, on account of the uncertainty of the moment of his arrival.

"Well, I must telegraph them that I'll be along in a day or two, or as soon as I have looked about the great metropolis a little," was the thought with which he entered his hotel. "They can hardly expect me to pass through New York for the first time without a look around me. I'll stay here to-day and to-morrow, and go on to them to-morrow evening. I will wire Uncle John accordingly, and write him a few words to the same effect."

He hastened to do so, without so much as delaying to register his name.

Ah! if he could have known the reception awaiting both his messages and himself!

CHAPTER II.

SINGULAR PREPARATIONS FOR THE NEPHEW'S RECEPTION.

THE telegram fell from the hands of Doctor John Wyville as abruptly as if it had been a live coal, and it would have surprised any one to see how keenly alert it made him, how excited and thoughtful.

"So, he has already reached New York, has he?" he ejaculated, inaudibly. "He will be here to-morrow evening. In the mean time—"

He looked at his watch, and then scanned a time-table earnestly.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I can get there! There is time to stop him!"

A strange gleam appeared in his eyes, and a swift flush changed the hue of his countenance, rendering it livid.

"Were he to come here," he resumed, with the air of excusing himself for some course he was entering upon, "one of his first demands upon me would be for the million and a half left him by his uncle. And how can I own up to him that I have already lost a goodly portion of his heritage in stock gambling? How explain to him that I must have *all* of that money, or be disgraced and ruined? How tell him that I have been robbed for years by the worst gang of bloodsuckers that ever played upon a human being? How acknowledge to him that my supposed wealth is a snare and a cheat, and that I have been on the verge of bankruptcy for months? How tell him that the very revenues of my profession are devoured before I receive them? Ah! what a horrible situation!"

He reflected for a few moments with terrible intensity.

"And even if I were able to bring myself to this humiliating confession," he added, "what good would it do me? Percy has no acquaintance with me. He cares nothing about me. He would not give me a dollar!"

He groaned, covering his face with his hands.

His practice was large, he being reputed an able and pains-taking physician, but he was regarded as a stern, taciturn, and even morose man, who had no friends in private life, and who received nothing more than a cold, unsympathetic respect from his colleagues.

His age was about fifty years.

His form was undersized, but he was singularly muscular, and all his movements abrupt and nervous, like his glances.

He had been left a widower three years after his marriage, and his family comprised only his daughter and himself, the former a charming girl of seventeen, named Nora, who had inherited her mother's beauty and disposition.

The doctor owned the house in which he resided, and which stood in one of the best quarters of Philadelphia, but it was heavily mortgaged.

He had of late let out the upper part to various tenants, with whom he had no personal dealings, however, that matter being in the hands of a real estate agent.

Arising suddenly, the doctor "braced" himself with a glass of brandy, and then began walking to and fro, with a springy and almost noiseless step.

With every thought that came to him he grew more and more nervous.

"When I began taking that money," he reflected aloud, "I fancied that a match between Nora and Percy would cover the consequences, if fate should turn against me. But it seems

that Nora has no inclination in that direction, and that Percy has been carrying on all these years an acquaintance by letter with the daughter of old Rube Hanson. In fact, from all I hear, he's as good as engaged to Hetty Hanson at this moment. One of his reasons for staying in New York a day or two is doubtless to see the girl and her father. Could anything be more to my disadvantage? The whole Hanson tribe are down on me as much as they can be. I dare say they'd keep Percy from coming here at all if they could. What hands for him to fall into! What a disgusting state of things! What a howl of delight 'll come from the whole pack when I am run under!"

He drew his breath hard, and into the rigid lines of his stern face grew a strange look of desperation and defiance.

"But why need I go under?" he asked himself, in a whisper that hardly caused his thin, compressed lips to move. "Why should I hesitate to act vigorously and promptly! As I have never so much as seen this nephew, there is no occasion for me to hesitate about suppressing him? Why should I allow him to come here and accomplish my ruin? The money Claude left him should by rights have come to me. Why should I allow a silly-minded brother to pass over my head and give all he has to a nephew? Oh! I'll not die without a struggle! This crisis shall be met in the one needful way!"

He proceeded to his medicine-case, which occupied nearly all of one side of his office, and filled a vial with prussic acid.

"Perhaps I'll lunch with him!" he muttered, with an air of dogged determination. "If not—"

He opened a drawer in his desk, and took out a revolver, which he examined critically, thrusting it into his pocket.

Then he secreted upon his person an ugly-looking bit of iron eight or nine inches long and an inch in diameter, with a stout cord looped into a hole at one end in such a way as to pass over his hand to the wrist, and thus indicating that this murderous weapon was designed to be carried in the sleeve.

His next measure was to place a small hand-bag, including among its contents a false beard and wig, a huge muffler, some sheets of note paper and envelopes, with pen and ink.

"Of course I can get hold of him in some way," he muttered, and it'll be a very singular run of luck if I cannot manage to get rid of him forever! Just how the task is to be accomplished can only be decided upon the spot. If he has gone to a hotel, I can readily get track of him. If he has gone to old Hanson's, that fact may put a straw or two in my way, but nothing shall save him!"

He touched a bell hastily, and the next instant, a tall, robust and surly-looking woman—the doctor's housekeeper—appeared on the threshold of a rear apartment.

"I'm going to Washington, Mrs. Mawney," announced the doctor and shall not be back until late to-morrow in all probability. You will say as much to my daughter, when she returns from her walk."

The housekeeper bowed in a silence as grim as her looks, and the doctor seized his hand-bag and hastily took his departure.

A moment Mrs. Mawney looked after him from a window, and then she stepped to a door leading into a hall, and called softly up the stairs:

"Come here, Mr. Hartle!"

Light steps were the next instant heard descending the stairs swiftly, and Mrs. Mawney was joined by a shrewd-looking, sharp-eyed man of about five-and-thirty years—one of the lodgers in the upper part of the house.

"He has just received a telegram, sir," communicated Mrs. Mawney hurriedly, "which seems to have shaken him up considerably, and he says he's going to Washington for a day or two. He acted so excited and strange that I thought you'd like to see, Mr. Hartle, where he is going."

"Thanks, Mrs. Mawney. Wait here."

Mr. Hartle hastened away in the direction the doctor had gone, and was absent nearly three-quarters of an hour, during which time Mrs. Mawney watched from a window for his return.

He came back, flushed and jubilant.

"He said Washington did he?" he queried.

The housekeeper assented.

"Well, he has gone to New York! But here's a copy of a telegram I have sent, and which will get there before he does!"

The housekeeper took the document and read as follows:

"Captain Reuben Hanson, 40 Broad street, New York.

"He has left here for your city, after getting a telegram which excited him, and after saying that he was called to Washington. Look out for him. Some mischief evidently brewing."

"HARTLE."

CHAPTER III.

A STRIKING RESEMBLANCE.

If you will wait a few moments, Mr. Wyville," said the hotel clerk to the new-arrived provincial, "I'll assign you a room looking on the

Square. We've been rather full lately, but I think the parties who have had number eighteen for a day or two past have just left."

"Suit yourself, sir," returned Percy, with an air of indifference. "But, it's not worth while to take too much trouble as I do not expect to remain longer than to-morrow evening."

"Sit down, please," pursued the clerk, briskly as he touched a bell. "Your room shall be ready in a few minutes."

At this moment a young guest of the house came down an adjacent staircase and approached the office.

"Has nothing come for me?" he asked of the clerk, with as deprecating an air as possible.

At the sound of his voice, the clerk turned toward him as slowly as scornfully.

"No, sir," was the answer.

"No letter?" pursued the guest, as if hoping against hope.

"No letter, sir," assured the clerk with an air that was scarcely civil. "If any letter had come for you, you'd find it in your box."

The inquirer turned away, with a gloomy air and clouded brow.

"There's only this for you," added the clerk, as he extended a slip of paper toward the guest, "and I trust it will receive prompt attention."

The guest hardly needed to glance at the paper to know what it was.

It was simply his bill.

"All bills here are payable weekly, Mr. Garson," added the clerk. "You have now been putting us off more than a week and the proprietors have instructed me not to wait longer for payment."

"I will pay by day after to-morrow, sir," declared the guest, in a resolute tone, as he turned away, walking rapidly to the entrance and disappearing from view.

"Yes, it's always to-morrow or next day with some folks," growled the clerk, as he looked after the debtor. "But he won't remain here much longer unless he pays, that's certain."

The little scene thus passing under Percy Wyville's gaze had fixed his attention, for several good reasons.

To begin with, he had noticed that the young debtor was almost an image of himself, after making due allowance for the difference between Percy Wyville's smiling and careless mien, and the anxious and saddened countenance of Mr. Garson.

They were not only of about the same age, height, and complexion, with the same dark eyes and hair, but there was also a very close resemblance in their features, so that any one would have required to know them both well to be sure of always telling one from the other.

"Of course he's disappointed in some way about getting a remittance," thought the light-hearted provincial. "But, he's just where I may be, a few weeks hence, if there should be any delay and difficulty in getting hold of the million and a half left me by Uncle Claude, or at least of some portion of it."

"Your room is ready, Mr. Wyville," said the clerk at this moment. "We have an excellent *table d'hôte* at one o'clock, if you should happen to be in at that hour."

Percy bowed understandingly, and then followed a porter, who had taken charge of his trunk and valise, and was leading the way upstairs.

Once in his room, the young stranger made his toilet, and then looked from one of his front windows, with a singularly thoughtful air, not to say an anxious one.

"Of course Hetty and her father do not know how near I am to—the fix this young Mr. Garson is in," he muttered. "It has probably never occurred to them to calculate how many of our poor Nova Scotian acres were necessary to pay my college terms and mother's last, long illness. They'll wonder, of course, that I did not drive to their house from the steamer. But, if I'm poor, I'm proud! Besides, I'd like to see a little of this great town by myself, without even the charm of Hetty Hanson's sweet eyes and voice to distract my attention. I'm here a day or two ahead of the letter announcing my coming, I think. In any case, I'll wear off a little of the 'Blue Nose' before I put in an appearance at their residence. It's even possible that I'll not call upon them until after I've seen Uncle John and received a few thousands on account, as I am by no means satisfied with my wardrobe or with the financial situation."

CHAPTER IV.

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE STRANGER.

AFTER a first interesting ride of several hours about the city, Percy Wyville returned to his hotel in time for the *table d'hôte*.

He was not at all displeased to find himself seated exactly opposite Mr. Garson, the young debtor who had undertaken to pay his bill "by day after to-morrow."

"I presume you have been here some time, sir?" said Percy, toward the close of the repast, offering one of those little table civilities which can always be utilized in such circumstances.

"Yes, sir," responded the young debtor, with

the air of a man who desires to cut short the conversation at its very commencement.

But the light-hearted young provincial was not easy to discourage.

He hastened to add in the same pleasant tone as before:

"Will you be here some days longer, sir?"

"Until to-morrow evening."

"That's just my case," said Percy, as his pleasant look deepened to a smile. "Just long enough to see the city and get rested from the particularly disagreeable voyage I had from Halifax. The fact is, I am expected at Philadelphia by an uncle, whom I am very anxious to see for various reasons."

The young debtor roused himself, appearing for the first time to take an interest in the remarks addressed to him by the Nova-Scotian.

"Ah, you are going to Philadelphia?" was the response.

"In the course of to-morrow. Are you acquainted in that city?"

"I've lived there a long time—or rather starved there," avowed Garson bitterly.

"Then perhaps you've heard of my uncle, who is a well-known physician," suggested Percy. "I refer to Doctor John Wyville!"

At that name, young Garson started, and a flush mantled his face.

"Yes, I know the doctor by name and by sight," he avowed, "although I have never spoken to him, and he does not know me from Adam. Living a long time in the same ward with him, it is only natural that I should occasionally see him riding by, or pass him on the sidewalk. Besides, your uncle is quite renowned in his sphere, and several of his works are often quoted as authorities on the subjects of which they treat."

"Yes, that's the man," declared Percy, with an air of pride. "And since you know him, even to this extent, we can do no less than regard ourselves as friends."

The conversation thus entered upon continued until the two young men had finished their dinner and proceeded to the sitting-room, where they lighted cigars and sat down in a retired corner, with the evident design of getting further acquainted.

"Doubtless you have some particular object in view, Mr. Wyville, in coming to the States," observed Garson, with a gloomy air, as he scanned the bright, handsome face of his new acquaintance searchingly.

"Yes, to secure a handsome fortune left me by an uncle."

"And to marry, I dare say?"

"Well, I'll not deny that such an event is within the range of possibility," and Percy smiled contentedly.

The features of the young debtor paled as deeply as suddenly.

"Your intended is of course the fair Nora, the doctor's daughter?" he faltered, in a husky voice.

"Oh, dear—no," replied the provincial, hardly noticing the agitation of Garson. "I do not believe in the intermarriage of cousins. Besides, I have never so much as seen my uncle and Nora, and the letter or two exchanged between us would hardly entitle me to call myself their correspondent. The lady I expect to marry resides in this city."

Garson flushed with joy.

The declarations of his new acquaintance seemed to lift a great weight from his soul.

"Ah! you know the 'fair, Nora,' then?" cried Percy, as he watched the change his few words had wrought in the aspect of the man beside him.

Garson assented.

"You have even been drawn under the spell of her loveliness?"

"Her loveliness and goodness—I cannot deny it," acknowledged Garson. "I have many reasons to think, in fact, that she regards my attentions with favor."

"Then why not tell her so?"

Garson heaved a sigh that could have best been classified as a convulsion of the soul.

"And so find myself in the hands of her stern-faced father?" he queried. "I who haven't a dollar, no friends, no trade even, nothing but a clerkship? I, who have been out of a situation for months past, although I have tried hard to find one? I, who have fled from Philadelphia, as from a paradise, which can never be opened to me, because of my poverty? I, who have been waiting here in vain for nearly two weeks for a possible remittance from a cousin in Colorado, with the intention of putting the ocean between me and the object of my hopeless worship? No, I have never spoken to Nora, although I love her to madness!"

He bowed his head upon his hands, and his form shook like a leaf in a gale of wind. It was only because he was hopeless, and because he had schooled himself severely, that he was able to speak of these things without breaking down altogether.

The first sentiment of Percy at this state of affairs was a feeling of wonder that he should have stumbled upon Garson in such a way and at such a moment.

The encounter looked more than fortuitous.

It bore all the ear-marks of that peculiar

sequence of events and concatenation of circumstances which all men unite to call providential.

"Of course I am not a man to listen unsympathetically to these confidences, my dear Mr. Garson," declared Percy, as he extended his hand, which his new acquaintance clasped warmly. "I see no good reason why your suit for the hand of my cousin should be hopeless. Let me have a brief outline of your history."

Garson hastened to comply.

The story was commonplace enough.

He had been left an orphan at a tender age, and had fallen into the hands of a miserly and selfish uncle, who had worked him nearly to death, and allowed him to go to a common district school three months in the winter, up to the age of thirteen, and who had treated him so badly thereafter that he had been obliged to resort to that oft-tried expedient of a wretched boyhood, running away. With such a start, it was no wonder that his way upward had been a hard one, and that he was still so far from being in a proper position to think of marriage.

But in all he said, and he seemed to speak with perfect truth and sincerity, there was not a word that did not redound to his credit.

He had even tried to secure a situation as driver or conductor on the horse cars, and also as fireman on railroads or steamboats, not to speak of a score of worse situations, such as a day laborer, and as a hostler in a livery, but all in vain.

"From all this," said Percy, when the almost despairing young man had concluded. "I get a good opinion of your honesty and integrity, and after all, these are the first conditions and essentials of a successful career in the world. Fortunately I am in a position to befriend you, and I shall take great pleasure in doing so. I have a handsome fortune in the hands of Doctor Wyville, and I cannot doubt for a moment that he will pay attention to the good word I shall say for you in due course."

Garson expressed his thanks warmly, but not without some serious mental reserves about the safety of the fortune to which Percy had alluded.

If Garson had chosen to do so, he could have repeated some very curious rumors concerning Dr. Wyville and his transactions, but he could not bear at that moment to put such a damper upon the spirits of his new acquaintance.

Possibly, too, Garson may have realized that the repetition of such rumors concerning the doctor would seriously affect the pleasant relations he had already established with the nephew, and his situation at that moment was too serious for him to take any chances of that nature.

"In the mean time," added Percy, producing his purse, and handing out three or four "twenties," "you had better step to the office and pay your bill. I happened to be there when the clerk was so rude to you, and I was tempted, even then, simply because of the resemblance you bear me, to come to your assistance."

It was in vain that the young debtor protested, speaking of the hoped-for remittance from Colorado in terms that were hardly approved by his own judgment.

"Never mind all that," persisted Percy. "If the Colorado cousin comes to the rescue, you can repay my loan therewith as soon as you please. Meanwhile, I insist upon the acceptance of this favor. This little load off your mind, you will be at liberty to take a stroll about town with me, and we'll spend the afternoon together."

Garson could not resist longer.

With tears in his eyes, he thanked his new friend most gratefully for his kindly loan, and then hastened to pay his bill, after which the two young gentlemen went out for a look at the city, passing several hours together.

CHAPTER V.

THE DECOY.

LATER in the day, or toward night, a little old man with a whitish beard, and well muffled up, could have been seen lingering near the entrance of the hotel in which Percy Wyville and Hubert Garson were guests, and watching assiduously all who came and went—utterly oblivious of the fact that he in turn was being watched by a man who looked enough like him to be his brother.

During one of his halts, as he stood half-hidden in a doorway, the little old man was approached by a young woman whose face was hardly visible under her wrappings, and whose garb was evidently a relic of better days, who said, abruptly:

"I am starving, sir! Can you not help me with a trifle of money?"

The little old man started violently, not so much at the demand, as at the face of the supplicant, her eyes and even her manner, as if her aspect had awakened in his breast some memory of other days.

"Starving?" he sneered, with a laugh. "Young and pretty—as you are! It's very strange!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped the woman, clasping her hand to her heart, and recoiling as if she had received a deadly blow.

She was about to pass on, pained and humil-

iated, when the little old man drew a quarter from his pocket and extended it toward the supplicant.

"Take this," he enjoined.

At the gleam of silver the young woman suppressed a sob and extended her hand.

Giving her the quarter, the little old man turned and walked rapidly away.

This departure, however, was not real, but simply a feint, for he halted promptly in a convenient doorway and looked to see what the subject of his alms would do with the money.

With a start of joyous surprise at the amount bestowed upon her, the woman hastened to a bakery near at hand, and demanded coffee and bread and butter, beginning to eat ravenously the moment she was supplied.

Sauntering slowly past, the little old man took note of the situation.

"She was really hungry, then," he muttered, under his breath. "I must keep an eye on her. She may be able to give me the assistance I need in this business. She'd be just the messenger to deliver our letter."

When she emerged from the bakery, he glided noiselessly to her side.

"Come with me, miss," he said. "I have something to say to you."

Without waiting for a response, he drew the young woman's arm within his own, and led the way under an overhanging porch, where both were sufficiently in the shadow to escape attention.

"I can be useful to you, if you will answer a few questions candidly," he added. "Do you belong in New York?"

"No, sir."

"How long have you been here?"

"Less than three months."

"Do you know anybody in this place?"

"No, I am sorry to say. If I did, I shouldn't be begging."

"Any family?"

"None."

"Orphan?"

"Worse than that; I was abandoned in infancy."

"Where did you come from?"

"Philadelphia."

The questioner had started visibly at the last two answers.

"What have you been doing here?"

"I've been a milliner's assistant. Half a dozen of us were brought here by a Mrs. Mantle, who fancied she could do well, and who had taken a very dear place on Fourteenth street. She lodged and fed us, but did not pay us anything. Some of the girls got tired of this state of things and went back to Philadelphia. As I had no money, I couldn't get away. Besides, Mrs. Mantle kept promising to pay me. But she suddenly slipped away without warning, and all she left was seized by her creditors, who turned me into the street."

"You ought to have looked for work elsewhere."

"That's what I did, of course, but no one wanted me. With two or three dollars I raised at the pawnshops, I hired a room, and lived a few days on bread and milk, looking constantly for employment. Finally, when rent was due, and money gone, my trunk was held for my debt, and I was turned out. I was in the street all last night, and such would have been the case to-night if I hadn't encountered you."

A brief silence succeeded.

The little old man appeared to reflect upon what he had heard, and to be satisfied with it.

"It appears from this," he resumed, "that you are acquainted only with the people where you have been lodging?"

"That's all, sir."

"Any desire to remain in New York?"

"No, sir; I'd like to go back to Philadelphia."

"What would you do there?"

"Being acquainted, I could doubtless find work."

"What's your name?" suddenly asked the questioner.

"Pauline."

The little old man started again, more violently than ever. The responses of the young woman seemed to probe his memory keenly.

"How much do you owe at your lodgings?" he asked, as he scanned the half-revealed face before him with singular earnestness.

"About two dollars."

"I will pay for you. You'll leave an order with the baggage Express, and have your trunk taken to the Pennsylvania station. Go and attend to this matter now, and then come back here. Here is the necessary money."

He handed the young woman three dollars, cutting short her thanks, and then plunged still deeper into the shadows enveloping him.

"In twenty minutes Pauline was back again."

"It's attended to?" he greeted, as he advanced to meet her.

"Yes, sir."

"Then take this letter. Enter this hotel at the ladies' entrance. Go up to the parlor, and ask for Percy Wyville. If he's not in, come back here with the letter. If he appears in person, assure yourself that he is the man named, and then give him the letter and leave him, hurrying away to the station. Here is money

enough for your fare to Philadelphia, and to support you two or three weeks after your arrival, while you look around for work. Is it agreed, Pauline? Will you do what I require of you?"

"Why not, sir?"

The whole matter seemed as simple as brief to Pauline Munson.

She had only to make sure of seeing Percy Wyville, and give him the letter.

"In good truth," said the little old man, "I am paying you largely for a very small service. But you've aroused my sympathies, and I feel that it would be wicked to let you die here in the streets. I will watch here to see you leave the hotel, and also to see the result of the steps we are taking. I can depend upon you, Pauline?"

"Implicitly, sir."

"You'll not make any mistake about the name, which is Percy Wyville?"

"I've fixed it in my mind, sir—Percy Wyville."

"Then go ahead, and good-by."

"Good-by, sir, and many, many thanks!"

And Pauline Munson hastened to acquit herself of the task she had undertaken.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROGRESS OF THE PLOT.

A FEW minutes later Percy Wyville was pacing to and fro just within the entrance of the hotel, in considerable agitation, and with heightened color.

His eyes kept turning toward the staircase he had just descended.

He was waiting for Garson.

"Will he never come?" he said to himself, impatiently, as he glanced anew at a letter he held in his hand. "Ah! there he is."

In a few moments more, his new acquaintance was beside him.

"Here's a go, Hubert," said Percy, taking Hubert Garson by the arm, and conducting him toward vacant chairs which were conveniently isolated. "Sit down. I was never more puzzled and mystified in my life!"

"Ah! what's up?" asked Hubert, as he sat down beside the young provincial.

"Well, here's a letter which purports to come from a young lady of Halifax, who has long been desirous of making my acquaintance, and who came from Halifax in the same steamer with me. But, read it!"

Hubert Garson hastened to do so, but not without many an ejaculation of interest and wonder.

"Well, this is a soft thing!" was his comment, when he had finished reading the epistle. "The young lady is so anxious to see you that she has sent the family coachman and carriage. The vehicle is waiting for you at the corner of Broadway and Eighteenth street. But how came you by the letter? Special messenger?"

"Yes, a young woman whose beauty and timidity would have caused you a flutter. I didn't intend to lose sight of her until after she had explained matters, but she gave me the slip as soon as I gave my attention to the letter."

"Perhaps your messenger is the young lady herself?" suggested Garson.

"Or rather her maid. At any rate, the messenger was not on the steamer. But, there were plenty of young ladies among the passengers—so many, in fact, that I am at a loss to even imagine which of them is the author of this epistle."

"You had no especial flirtation with any of the number, Percy, during the voyage?"

"Nothing of the sort," assured Wyville. "The unromantic and melancholy truth is, I was as sea-sick as you could desire your worst enemy to be, and couldn't have wasted a thought upon the greatest beauty in the world."

"Then the mystery deepens," declared Garson. "What action are you going to take?"

Percy Wyville glanced at one or two phrases in the letter, and then answered:

"I must confess that my curiosity has been deeply aroused by this singular note. I'd like to 'resign myself to the guidance of the old family coachman,' and I think such a step could be taken with all 'due discretion,' as recommended. But what if the whole proceeding should cover some infernal trap?"

"But what can it cover, my dear friend?" queried Garson, as he again glanced at the mysterious epistle.

"Some plot to murder me, perhaps," answered Percy Wyville, half-seriously.

"For what purpose, or upon what grounds?" demanded Garson. "Even if some rogue should know about your inheritance, that very knowledge would tell him that you are not yet in possession of it. Besides, who can know that you are here? Who can have plotted?"

"The idea of violence is indeed absurd," acknowledged Percy, after a few moments of reflection. "The letter is far more likely to be the thoughtless indiscretion of some young miss in an independent situation, than a step in the scheme of some ruffian to murder me. In any case, I'm not the man to shrink from a little risk in seeing what there is behind this communication. Why shouldn't I at least take a

look at the coachman, and hear what he has to say?"

"I was about to suggest as much," returned Garson. "Besides, if you care to respond to the letter, how easy for me to follow close behind you and take note of all that is said and done! Should any villainy be on foot, I can come to your assistance at the least demand, and it's safe to say that the pair of us could hold our own anywhere."

"Quite right, Hubert. Since you are so good as to play detective, 'for this night only,' I can see what there is under this curious document. I'll walk quietly to the corner where the carriage of our fairy is waiting," he added, with a careless laugh, "and you can readily get near enough unnoticed to hear me repeat where the same is to be driven."

Garson nodded understandingly.

"Of course I'm foolish to take any notice of such a letter," said Percy. "But 'young men will be young men,' as I've heard my good old grandmother say many a time."

"Are you armed, Percy?"

"Certainly not! Why armed, with New York and Philadelphia as the objective points of my travels?"

"True, Percy. But, here is a loaded revolver I will loan you. The fact is," and the young man's brow clouded, "I've come very near taking within a few days past, a longer journey than any you have had in view!"

"Then don't ever get into that mood again, Hubert," enjoined Percy earnestly, as he pocketed the weapon. "What! thoughts of suicide at one-and-twenty! It's understood, I hope, that I will stand by you, Hubert, and speak a good word for you to Uncle John and the fair Nora, to say nothing of helping you into some position or business that will soon make you independent? But enough of all this. I will now fly to my adventure, and leave you to the task of preserving me from the consequences of my rashness."

He pressed the hand of his new acquaintance, with a gay air, and turned away briskly, proceeding at a quiet pace toward the rendezvous named in the letter.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VICTIM.

THE little old man had carried out the intentions he had avowed to Pauline Munson.

After witnessing the precipitate departure of his decoy from the hotel, he waited eagerly to see if the young provincial would fall into the trap which had been set for him.

He had begun to have serious apprehensions of a failure, when a young man appeared at the entrance of the hotel, and paused to light a cigar, with a glance along the sidewalk and into the Square which was preoccupied enough to have betrayed his identity to any one endowed with the slightest detective instinct.

"Ah, that must be the fellow," muttered the little old man, as he left his post of observation and strode nervously toward Broadway. "He has decided to come!"

This view was confirmed by the movements of the young man in question, and the watcher flitted away ahead of him with muscular strides vanishing from the Square.

As he neared the corner of Eighteenth street and Broadway, Percy noticed a stylish turnout in waiting, with a much-coated figure on the box, and readily divined that he had under his gaze the "family coachman and carriage" of the mysterious letter.

"You are waiting for me, driver, I suppose?" said Percy, in a guarded tone, as he halted abreast of the vehicle, at the same time carelessly exhibiting the note Pauline had brought him.

The coachman assented, with a keen glance at the speaker, springing down lightly and opening the door of the vehicle.

Percy took his place, and the door was closed upon him.

"I would like to ask—"

"Not a word, please," interrupted the coachman. "My lips are sealed, sir! Such an appointment is to take or to leave, but, in either case, the one watchword of the situation is discretion."

"Very well, driver. I was about to ask, with all due discretion, in what direction you are to drive me?"

"To the Weehawken Ferry, at the foot of Forty-third street," was the answer.

"To the Weehawken Ferry," returned Percy, raising his voice as if surprised. "All right, then. Go ahead."

As the coachman mounted his box, Percy glanced from his window and received an almost imperceptible nod from Hubert Garson, who was sauntering up the street, and who had overheard the direction announced.

The ride to the ferry was accomplished without remark or incident, as was also the passage across the river. Percy exchanged glances repeated with Garson on the boat, but neither of them noticed that they, carriage, coachman and all, were being followed and watched by a man who seemed to have modeled his "make-up" after that presented by the "family coachman" of the puzzling letter.

On leaving the boat the carriage turned into the "river road," or that which skirts the west bank of the Hudson, going to the northward.

By this time the dull shadows of the afternoon had commenced deepening into night, and in less than ten additional minutes, or before the carriage had left the ferry a mile behind it, the darkness had become comparatively intense.

Suddenly the vehicle halted, just as Percy noticed that it had left the road, turning into what appeared to be private but deserted grounds.

"This is as far as we can drive, sir," announced the coachman, as he leaped lightly to the ground and opened the door of the carriage. "I'll hitch the horses here, and we'll ascend on foot to the house."

Percy was familiar enough with the configuration of the shore of the Hudson thereabouts not to be particularly surprised at this announcement, and he alighted in silence, while the driver hitched his horses to the tree beneath which they halted.

"Follow me, sir, if you please," resumed the driver, as he led the way up a pathless slope. "It's only a step."

Percy hardly had misgivings at this moment, but it would be too much to say that he was fully satisfied with the situation.

He was able to make out the figure of Hubert Garson behind the carriage, however, and this circumstance was enough to cause him to follow his guide without suggestion or remonstrance.

The route grew rough and steep rapidly, and the couple soon found themselves in the edge of what appeared to be a sparse and diminutive grove of pines and other trees of that nature.

A few steps further, and the scene around Percy became so shaded and shut in, so lonely and silent, that it could not have failed to inspire him with very disquieting suggestions.

At length he halted, with the abruptness of a man thoroughly startled.

The rattle of a stone he had dislodged with his foot came up to him from a long, long distance below.

"Why, we're on the verge of a cliff!" he ejaculated, with sudden suspicion. "Where are we, driver? I see nothing of any house!"

"It's there, sir," returned the coachman, raising his arm, as if to point out the whereabouts of a dwelling. "Only a few rods away."

"I see nothing, driver, not even a light—"

The declaration was terribly interrupted.

The arm of the driver descended with a heavy thud, and Percy Wyville lay bleeding and insensible at the feet of the pretended coachman.

Thrusting into a pocket the short bar of iron with which the blow had been given, the driver produced a lighted bull's-eye, placing it on a stump near him, and proceeded to rifle the pockets of his victim.

"Yes, this is the man!" he muttered, as he shuffled through his hands a package of papers and letters. "He's Percy Wyville! Ah, a thousand-dollar greenback! That's worth keeping!" and he swiftly transferred everything to his own pockets. "A single step more—"

With the quickness of a tiger bounding upon his prey, the terrible masquerader seized the insensible young man at his feet and launched him over the brow of the cliff upon which this work of violence and treachery had been accomplished.

At that moment a wild cry of surprise resounded over the scene from the lips of Hubert Garson, who had arrived upon the cliff just in time to witness the disappearance of his new acquaintance in that awful void.

"Villain!" cried Hubert, as he hurled himself upon the assassin.

A short, terrific struggle succeeded, during which Hubert tore a false beard from the face of his antagonist and a wig from his head at a moment when the latter's face happened to be turned fully toward the light of the bull's-eye.

At sight of the features thus revealed, Hubert Garson uttered a cry which can be compared only to the yell of a madman—a cry of unutterable wonder, stupor and horror—and then released his hold of his struggling and desperate adversary, turning upon his heel and flying from the spot as precipitately as if he had been pursued by a thousand demons.

A few brief instants only the astonished assassin hurried in pursuit of Hubert, and then he returned to the scene of the struggle, replacing the wig and beard which so completely modified his aspect.

"Who is he?" he muttered, seizing and concealing his bull's-eye. "Did he see me plainly enough to be able to recognize me later? Nonsense! What is there to fear from such an encounter? He's in Weehawken, while I shall be a few hours hence in Philadelphia. The other will never trouble me. No man could descend that precipice and live. All is as it should be!"

And with this he hurried away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEPHEW'S SUBSTITUTE.

THE flight of Hubert Garson continued until he was out of breath.

He caught many a tumble, so dense had the shadows of the night now become, but it is

doubtful if he was even conscious of the fact, so entirely had his every mental faculty been upset by his recognition of the assassin.

Naturally, and as a result of mere instinct, he had retraced his steps toward the spot where the carriage had been left, and here he fell in a heap on the sward, looking so white, so scared, so breathless, and so terror-stricken, that almost any one seeing him at that moment would have suspected him of having committed a horrible crime.

"He!" came from his bloodless lips. "Doctor John Wyville! The uncle of his victim! The very man in whose hands Percy's fortune has been left! Alas! it's no mistake! No phantasm of a disordered brain! I saw him only too clearly! I recognized him only too certainly! How terrible! And Nora—poor girl!"

He lay panting and shivering, as if in a mortal convulsion.

"But, is it certain that Percy is really dead?" he asked himself, with a sudden transition of emotions, as he gained his feet abruptly. "Perhaps he may still be alive!"

He regained the river road, and hurried along under the cliffs hedging it in, and which every instant became taller and taller.

Ere long, turning into an open field, and ascending a sort of ridge he could not make out clearly in the darkness, he arrived at the base of the precipice on the brow of which the terrible crime of John Wyville had been accomplished.

Lighting several matches in succession, he searched in breathless eagerness among the rocks and bushes at the foot of the precipice.

"Ah! there it is!" he finally ejaculated.

Another match or two gave him such views of the motionless figure, and of the bruised and blood-covered features, that his heart sunk within him.

"Yes, he is dead!" he muttered, placing his hand upon the breast of the victim. "And, it is no wonder," he added, as he tried in vain to note the height of the cliff. "The heart has ceased to beat! Nothing can be done for him!"

What bitter regrets filled the agonized soul of Hubert Garson at that moment!

He glanced at the adjacent river, as pointed out by the lights of various craft upon it, with the air of one tempted to end all his troubles in its dark waters.

He stood motionless a few moments, so shocked and weak, that he experienced, for the first time in his life, a fear that his senses were about to leave him.

"Of course I can never betray what I have seen to any human being!" he muttered. "Better that the assassin should remain unpunished than that the knowledge of his crime should kill poor, innocent Nora!"

What terrible thoughts crowded upon him!

He not only remembered the youth and high hopes of the victim, but he thought of his own broken career, and of the fair girl who would wait in such wonder and anxiety for her lover's coming.

"Would that I had died in his place!" he ejaculated. "But, since that was not to be, I can at least die with him!"

He resumed possession of the revolver he had loaned Percy Wyville, and raised the weapon to the level of his forehead.

A touch, and all would be over.

But, better thoughts succeeded.

"Instead of dying like a fool," he said to himself, as he lowered his hand, securing the revolver on his person, "why should I not live to be the avenger of Percy? Ah! an idea strikes me! Since he's really dead, and so disfigured that a recognition of his identity is impossible, why shouldn't he be buried as Hubert Garson, while I take his place, and live henceforth as Percy Wyville?"

If the thought of such a substitution was as dangerous as daring, it also possessed a keen attraction for a man in Hubert's actual situation.

His decision was quickly taken.

As a bogus nephew of the assassin, he could at least avenge the victim!

He did not give a thought to the difficulties and dangers which might easily grow out of such an undertaking, and which must even necessarily attend it.

"Yes, I'll be a Nemesis to haunt and scourge that man, since I cannot proclaim his guilt to the world," was the thought with which Hubert transferred various letters and papers in his own name to the pockets which had been emptied by the assassin. "When my murdered friend and benefactor is found here, he will be taken for Hubert Garson! No one in New York is sufficiently acquainted with us to tell one from the other, or to dispute the silent evidence of the papers which will be found upon him!"

Turning away, he began retracing his steps toward the ferry, but in a more direct course than that by which he had come.

He had not gone far, however, before he experienced a tumble which left him ankle-deep in a pool of water.

"Where am I?" was his thought, as he scrambled out of the pool, and earnestly scanned his surroundings.

The river was the first guide to his scrutiny, its outlines being unmistakable, even in the darkness now reigning.

Next he noticed—for he was now getting away from the shadows of the cliff—that a telegraph pole, with its network of wires, was suspended almost directly above him.

"Heavens! I'm on a railroad!" he exclaimed, as he began climbing up an embankment.

If he had not previously discovered the fact, he would have learned it now from the roar of a train which was coming around a curve scarcely a hundred rods from him.

A few moments Hubert stood as if rooted to the spot, casting bewildered glances in the direction from which he had come.

"Why, I may have left Percy on the track!" he ejaculated. "I—I was too horrified to have eyes for anything save his bleeding face and form!"

He started hurriedly in the direction his thoughts had taken, but was not long in realizing that he was too late.

With a sudden increase of its wild roar, and with a prolonged whistle, the train arrived under the tall, rocky cliff, the headlight of the locomotive giving Hubert the timely assistance he needed to get out of the way.

Still a few moments more, and the train shot past him, leaving him in a darkness that seemed all the more profound by contrast with the glare in which he had just been enveloped.

A single instant Hubert struggled with a wild desire to retrace his steps and see if Percy had indeed fallen from the cliff directly upon the track, and then he continued his course toward the ferry.

As could have been seen by a single glance at him, or even at his outlines, as dimly presented in the darkness, he had turned all his thoughts and energies to the strange substitution which had suggested itself to him, and even been forced upon him by the very facts of his situation.

CHAPTER IX.

PREPARATIONS FOR A RECEPTION.

THE face of Dr. John Wyville, as he appeared at the breakfast table, on the following morning, was so haggard and anxious that his daughter could not help being worried by it.

It had become a second nature with her to be always solicitous for him.

She was the possessor of one of those kindly and thoughtful souls which allow no misery within hearing to pass unquestioned.

She was tall and fair with a beauty of no common order, her features and form being suggestive of the spirit which dwelt within this charming temple.

"Did you sleep well, papa?" asked Nora, as she seated herself at the table.

"Far from it," declared the doctor, with the air of being amazed because Nora had noticed the tell-tale lines upon his unpleasing visage.

"I never had a worse day than yesterday. The wife of a senator was the patient. The case was hopeless from the start, and the poor lady died under our hands. Then, too, these sudden journeys tell upon me. It is a long ride to Washington and back, especially with such a terrible surgical operation between the two trips."

The maiden looked grave and thoughtful a few moments, and then said:

"Does not all this prove, papa, what I have so often asserted, namely, that you ought to take an assistant or a partner, or else—how shall I say it?—take a partial leave of the out-door world, and confine yourself to office practice?"

At this suggestion, Dr. Wyville looked as if he had been subjected to a shower bath of very dirty water.

"Retire?" he growled, glancing involuntarily at the fair speaker. "Should anything of the kind really befall me, the retirement will extend much further than you imagine. In fact, any movement of that sort will cease only when we have reached the poor-house!"

Nora became so confused at this reception of her suggestion, that she proceeded to pour the coffee in silence.

The more especially as Mrs. Mawney, the housekeeper, made her appearance at this moment, taking her place at the table, and the father and daughter were not in the habit of discussing personal matters in her presence.

After breakfast and as soon as the housekeeper had retired, the doctor leaned his elbows wearily on the table, and said:

"I have news for you, Nora. Your cousin has arrived in New York, and will be here this evening. At least such is the purport of the letter and telegram he has sent us and which came in my absence."

He handed Nora the documents in question, and she read them with affectionate interest, as also with a slight increase of color.

"Of course we shall be very glad to see him," she declared. "How odd that he should be the only relative we have never seen!"

"Perhaps we shall appreciate him all the more on that account," said the doctor with a forced smile. "Certain it is that some of our nearest relatives have not worn so well as I could have wished. Your Uncle Claude, for instance. Think of his passing over your head and mine to give his property to this young stranger, who had—who has the simple country

habits of a provincial, and was well-content to earn his own living."

Nora knew only too well that the bequest referred to was one of the sorest subjects her father had recently been called upon to discuss, and she accordingly refrained from saying that she had never felt inclined to blame her uncle for the action he had taken in that matter.

"Of course we must give a dinner and reception in Percy's honor," resumed the doctor, after a questioning glance or two at the face of his daughter. "The very least we can do is to receive this scion of our house with due ceremony."

"At the same time, papa," returned Nora, "we must not forget that we are still in mourning for Uncle Claude, who died only four months ago. We shall rejoice with heartfelt joy over Percy's arrival, of course, but I would prefer to keep his reception as quiet as possible."

"As quiet as we can, Nora, without forgetting that he is my brother's heir," said the doctor, with a suppressed bitterness that did not escape his daughter's notice. "To be sure, Percy had no reason to count upon this inheritance, and he never would have received it, if it had not been for the influence of the Hansons, but I'm not disposed to quarrel with the inevitable. We must receive the young man as if he were a returned prodigal, but at the same time we need not forget that he takes a million and a half from us, or rather from you, Nora, for it is for you that I toil like a slave and live like a hermit."

"I am very grateful to you, dear papa," assured Nora. "But I am sorry to see you work so hard and enjoy life so little. You ought to remember that I am not at all ambitious, and that I do not care for money."

"Nonsense, Nora. Mere chatter of an innocent who has never wanted for anything, who has no real knowledge of the world, and who is ready to believe that quails and toast will fall upon the table for the mere wishing. You are wrong, girl. Money is everything. May you never be called upon to learn, as I did, in my early days, by working my nails off, what a bitter and terrible thing is poverty."

"Oh, I do not despise money, papa," said Nora, forcing a smile, but without wholly banishing from her fair face the shadow which had for several days rested upon it. "I merely think that we ought not to render unto it a greater tribute than it really deserves."

The doctor stirred uneasily, with an involuntary frown, and a metallic sort of glare crept into his dull, restless eyes.

"Let us drop all that," he said, "and stick to our text. As the uncle of my nephew, I am the best judge of what is becoming, and I shall invite a dozen of our nearest friends to meet him here this evening. In any other case, there would be plenty of backbiters to say that I am mad because we have been robbed by the last will and testament of my brother, for that we have really been robbed by that document is perfectly certain."

Nora regarded her father with astonishment, not a little surprised at the tone of bitterness, almost of wrath and menace, he had for the first time manifested in connection with her uncle's will.

"Yes," he resumed, "I regard it as a positive duty for us to prove that we are delighted at my nephew's arrival, and no one will blame us for forgetting for a few hours, under such happy circumstances, the grief which was caused us by the death of your uncle."

"All shall be as you wish, papa," said Nora, dutifully. "But are you quite sure that Percy will arrive this evening?"

The doctor looked fixedly at Nora a moment, and then replied:

"At least he has so written—so telegraphed."

"To be sure, papa, but you will note that the terms in which he speaks of arriving to-night are not exactly absolute."

"Oh, he will come," assured the doctor. "And even if he didn't, that is a point which does not particularly concern us. The least we can do is to make suitable preparations and expect him. Should he change his mind about coming to-night, he'll send us further information."

He drew out his watch nervously, and noted the hour.

"So late!" he muttered, as he arose briskly. "You had better see Mrs. Mawney immediately, and settle all the details for the evening, as I shall not have time to-day to give the matter a thought. We'll have dinner precisely at seven. Look your best, my dear child, and try to be a little more smiling. I have noticed, for several days past, that you seem to be preoccupied and gloomy. I must leave you now for an hour or two, as I have to make a number of visits."

He pressed his lips an instant to the girl's forehead, in his usual mechanical fashion, and then hurriedly left her.

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERIOUS COMMUNICATION.

WHAT a sigh was that which came from the lips of Nora Wyville, as she found herself alone!

Taking her way to the parlor, she drew aside the curtains from one of the front windows, and looked searchingly into the street.

She had never been more gloomy than at that moment. It was as if she were looking for some one long absent.

"Where can he be?" was the thought that thrilled her entire being. "Can he really have been so mad as to place the ocean between us, as he so sadly suggested? Or is he starving in New York? Shall I ever see him again? Does he really care for me? Why is he silent?"

Tears came unbidden, but she wiped them away hastily, as if ashamed of them.

"He might at least spare me this cruel suspense," she resumed, as she turned away from the window and began pacing wearily to and fro. "If he would only write me a few lines—ever so few—to say that he is well and hopeful, and that he will return to me as soon as fortune has smiled upon him. Poor Hubert! Why could he not have had a rich uncle to leave even a tenth of a million and a half? He must suffer even more than I do at the thought of his poverty, since it prevents him from even saying that he loves me. Oh, where can he be at this moment?"

It seemed to Nora that the absence of Hubert Garson was all the harder to bear because of the promised arrival of her provincial cousin, whom she had never seen, and in whom her interest must naturally be far less than in one who, for more than a year, had contrived to pass a few moments of almost every day in her presence.

"Ah! if it were only Hubert who is coming!" she murmured, with glowing cheeks and kindling eyes. "If he could only come to me, not with a fortune, but with even a few thousand dollars, or enough to make it possible for us to avow our love to papa! Will such an hour ever come for us?"

To ask such a question was to take up the whole burden of her misery anew, and again she approached the window, parting the curtains and looking out.

"Perhaps he is still unable to find a place," she mused sadly. "Perhaps he has fallen ill among strangers. He may even be dead!"

A step startled her, causing her to turn.

The new-comer was her maid, who was rather old than young, and rather homely than pretty.

"Have you any especial orders for this morning, miss?" asked the maid.

"Yes, Gertie," answered Nora, rousing herself. "This is to be a busy day with us. My cousin, Percy Wyville, has written and telegraphed us that he will be here this evening, and papa desires to honor his arrival with a dinner and reception. Let's go and find Mrs. Mawney, and devote the next few hours to the necessary preparations."

We need not dwell upon the events that succeeded.

By the middle of the afternoon everything had been arranged to suit the ideas and tastes of the young mistress of the house, and she took her way to her chamber, throwing herself into an easy-chair, with an air of weariness, and giving herself up to the very wide and somewhat contradictory range of thoughts crowding upon her.

"May I come in, miss?" was the query which soon aroused her from her musings.

"Certainly, Gertie," was the answer.

If Nora had been less preoccupied at that moment, two facts would have struck her.

The first was that Gertie was singularly nervous and excited. The second was that a young man was concealed behind one of the posts of a not far distant porch, and that he was paying very particular attention to the graceful figure at the window, at the same time that he watched all who came and went, taking good care to remain as much under cover as possible.

But, Nora's eyes were far less active than her mind.

"I thought you'd like to make your toilet, miss," continued Gertie, "and here is what I would like you to wear."

The remark was quite warranted by the age and long services of Gertie, who had cared for Nora from her babyhood, and the latter did not think for a moment of taking offense at it.

"What! white!" was all she said, at sight of the beautiful evening robe laid out for her inspection.

"Yes, miss."

There was no fault to find with the choice and suggestion, since white was in excellent taste for a young girl in mourning, after four months' for an uncle.

"Very well, Gertie, I will do as you wish," was Nora's decision.

In less than an hour, thanks to the skill and experience of Gertie, Nora found herself attired in such a ravishing fashion that, on surveying her reflection in a full length mirror, she could not help experiencing a gratification which quickly chased the clouds from her brow and brought a smile to her lips.

From the crown of her head to the soles of her feet all was as it should be.

"You have done extremely well, Gertie," she declared. "If cousin Percy does not admire me this evening, the fault will not be yours, that is certain."

With brief but heartfelt thanks for this appre-

ciation of her efforts, Gertie excused herself and withdrew, to give her attention to other duties pressing upon her.

For a few minutes after the withdrawal of her maid, Nora remained standing near one of the front windows of her chamber, musing upon all the facts and circumstances of her situation with an intensity which left her a little nervous and excited, and then she crossed the floor to the mantle-piece, to pick up a pair of those long ten-button gloves which, invented to hide the scrawny arms of superannuated spinsters, have become *de rigueur* at evening parties for even the most favored of their sisters.

As Nora extended her hand to pick up the gloves, she gave a start, her eyes opening to their fullest extent.

"What she had seen was a letter lying upon the gloves."

The address of the mysterious epistle consisted of a single word, her own name, Nora.

As the maiden learned later, the letter had been given to Gertie in the street by the young man who was concealed in the doorway of a neighboring house, and who had paid the maid well for undertaking to place the communication in the hands of her mistress.

Surprised, and even startled—for she fancied the handwriting on the envelope bore a strange resemblance to Hubert Garson's—Nora hastened to see what the missive contained, and read as follows:

"This evening the lives of many persons will depend upon your coolness and courage. If you are loved by any one, or if you love any one, be firm and courageous, be impassible as a sphinx, whatever may occur. *Burn this.*"

No signature, no sure clew to the identity of the writer; but, Nora could not help avowing to herself that the handwriting responded to her idea of what Hubert Garson's would have been if he had undertaken to disguise it.

"This evening," she repeated. "The lives of many persons? Coolness and courage? How strange! What can be the meaning of this very mysterious epistle?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE DOCTOR'S BROKER.

THE hours of consultation of Dr. Wyville, in the afternoon, were from three to six.

Notwithstanding his high charges, his patients were numerous.

His office servant was a broken-down candidate for the pulpit, whose ill-health, as he alleged—a lack of brains was his real trouble—had prevented him from going through the long course of studies necessary to his advent into that sphere of usefulness.

All that remained to Mr. Tobias—for such was the name under which one of his Huguenot ancestors had emigrated to America—of those early days was an affectation of the ministerial calling which still hung about him, not merely in his garb, but also in his language and manners.

He was not only always as solemn as an owl, but he was quite as methodical.

For instance, when the patients began to arrive, each one received from Tobias a check with a number, beginning at the first numeral and frequently running into the forties and fifties.

In this way, each was admitted to the doctor's presence in the actual order of his arrival, a system which had all the merits of fairness, although it occasionally caused those patients at the tail of the list a long interval of waiting.

The garb of Tobias was invariably a seedy black, but its effect was modified by a new white "choker" and very carefully polished boots.

"Are there many patients to-day, Tobias?" asked Dr. Wyville, as he seated himself at his desk, a little after three o'clock, on the eventful afternoon to which the thread of our narrative has advanced.

"Twenty-seven," replied Tobias, who had been trained by the doctor to the highest degree of brevity and precision.

"Then I shall not be able to see them all, Tobias. I cannot receive anybody to-day after five o'clock. The house must be empty and arranged for the reception immediately after that hour. You are aware that I expect my nephew this evening?"

Tobias bowed low, with every appearance of being flattered at the confidential tone of his employer, who added:

"Now let them come in."

"Mr. Brail is here, sir," announced Tobias.

The doctor moved wearily, while his dark face grew still darker.

"In the parlor?" he queried, with a startled air.

"No, sir. He always comes by the private entrance, and he is there."

The factotum indicated with a gesture the nearest of several private reception rooms.

"Then show him in," enjoined the doctor, with an involuntary frown. "You need not admit any of the patients until after he has gone, when I will ring."

The factotum had scarcely left his employer's presence when Mr. Brail made his appearance. The least glance at the new-comer would have

told any one that he belonged to the tribe of Israel.

His hooked nose, his black keen eyes, his curly hair, his free-and-easy and at the same time obsequious deportment, his loud and baggy garb, the pin in his cravat, the rings on his fingers, and the immense chain crossing his vest, the whole surmounted by a greasy and battered "stove-pipe," all proclaimed his identity as plainly as any words could have done.

"You are here for more money?" cried the doctor, almost savagely, without responding to the salute of this ignoble personage.

"Naturally," replied Mr. Brail, as he took possession of the nearest chair without waiting for an invitation to that effect.

"How much?"

"Twenty thousand dollars. I've never known a more rapid and sweeping change in the market than to-day."

The doctor clinched his hands, and a flood of bile flew to his face, leaving it mottled, while his eyes grew bloodshot.

"But it's certain our prospects were never better than yesterday," he declared. "You said we had a sure thing—absolutely certain. But it seems that you don't know your business, or that my evil destiny still pursues me!"

"Oh, another deal will turn the tables," assured Brail, carelessly. "What we lose to-day we can gain to-morrow."

"That's what you've been telling me a long time," said the doctor, angrily. "You've caused me to lose more than a million within a year, Jacob."

"The same here, doctor," returned Brail, as carelessly as before. "But all the same I don't propose to whine about it."

"I should think not," growled the doctor, as his suppressed rage broke forth, causing him to bring his fist down furiously upon his desk, while a whitish froth appeared on his lips. "Every word you tell me is a lie! You've never lost a cent! To the contrary, you gain all I lose. You are a thieving, sneaking, miserable scoundrel!"

"Then find another broker to carry your deals and meet your obligations," returned the visitor, without taking the least notice of the unsavory epithets which had been hurled at him.

"You know very well that I can do nothing of the sort," declared the doctor.

"Is that my fault?" sneered Brail. "We have been associated in so many deals, some of which would hardly bear the light, that it wouldn't do at all to let the public know what use you are making of the enormous revenues you derive from your patients. To be candid, you are a puzzle to even me, doctor. When a man receives thirty or forty thousand a year, as you do, from his profession, I can't understand why he should gamble in stocks with the desperation of a madman."

The doctor arose abruptly.

His features were ghastly and rigid.

"Well, I can understand the matter," he avowed. "The truth is, I want to be rich and independent. Not for myself, but for my daughter, whose fortune I have squandered with you by heeding your counsels, your lies, your eternal promises, which have led me on from defeat to defeat, while all you have touched for yourself and in your own name has turned to gold!"

"You are unfair, doctor, to say that you have lost all with me," protested the Jew. "A goodly portion of your cash has passed into the keeping of Mrs. Levison."

"You know her?" cried the doctor, recoiling several steps, with a surprise akin to consternation.

"Naturally," acknowledged the Jew smilingly. "When I deal with any one, I take care to know all his affairs from the ground upwards!"

Dr. Wyville ran his fingers through his hair, with an air of helpless fury.

"But let's dismiss all those irrelevant matters," proposed Brail. "Your patients are waiting to see you, and I am in a hurry. You can have three days to put up the twenty thousand you have lost. Will you be ready?"

"In three days? Impossible!"

"In that case, you comprehend what will be the result? A fine figure you'll cut, as one unable to meet his engagements."

"Give me the details of these new transactions."

Nothing was easier. The broker had them all at the ends of his fingers. He made white black, and black white, to be sure, and his explanations only seemed to deepen the Egyptian darkness in which the whole "deal" was enveloped. But the upshot and outcome of the whole matter was that the doctor had lost his twenty thousand dollars in the most regular and orthodox fashion.

"I must have a delay in this settlement," were the next words of the victim.

"How many days?"

"At least fifteen, Jacob."

"You talk like a fool, doctor," declared the broker. "With your name, and in your circumstances, with your position, you can raise the amount at any moment."

"You're mistaken, Jacob," affirmed the doctor earnestly. "I have exhausted all my re-

sources, and abused my facilities for borrowing with everybody and in every direction. I'm in a pocket and you know it only too well!"

"I had an idea nevertheless," said Brail, with the same pitiless, sneering and brutal air he had displayed throughout the interview, "that the Fountain affair had set you afloat for a few days at least."

The look the doctor turned upon his associate at this remark was wild with terror.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing. I was merely thinking aloud. But, if you are really in such a pocket as you say, why should you give a party this evening?"

"It's merely a reception for my nephew," explained the doctor huskily.

"Ah, yes—that Percy Wyville who has carried off a million and a half you had such lively hopes of getting," said the Jew mockingly. "How much you ought to love him!"

"I'm not to blame for the preferences of my brother, nor do I find any fault with them," declared the doctor. "Besides, is the heritage of my nephew any of my business?"

"Not particularly. But an idea strikes me. This nephew will arrive this evening?"

"He will—in all probability!"

"Very good. Why not borrow of him the twenty thousand you are short? The very least he can do is to accommodate you."

The doctor regarded the broker with a fixed and thoughtful gaze.

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Simply to give you a bit of good advice, as I am in the habit of doing."

"Sure enough, it's an idea," acknowledged the doctor. "I'll think about it."

He wiped his face nervously, with a sudden realization that it was bathed in perspiration.

"You'll do well to act upon the hint," advised Brail, as he gained his feet. "I'll try to wait upon your motions two or three days, but that is all I can do for you. Take care not to forget me. Good-bye for the present. You've no time to waste, neither have I."

And with this he planted his greasy and battered hat upon his head and took his departure.

"The infernal villain!" muttered the doctor, looking after him with glances which would have been fatal, if mere looks could have killed him.

"The fiendish idiot!" was the farewell commentary of the Jew. "No doubt he'd like me to swallow a dose of his prescribing. But if I should ever be ill, he's not the sort of doctor I shall call to my bedside, certain!"

Left to himself, the doctor took two or three turns in his office, with his chin upon his breast, and his eyes fixed and glassy.

"A few days," he muttered—"even a few days—and I shall be saved!"

Dropping into his chair, he burrowed his hot and livid features in his hands, while his whole frame trembled with the nervous agitation his interview with Brail had caused him.

A few moments thus passed, as he slowly mastered his emotions, and then he extended his hand to touch the call-bell on his desk, to inform Tobias that he was ready to begin receiving his patients.

But he did not give effect to the intention.

Instead, he uttered a cry of surprise, his hand dropping nervelessly to his side.

A woman stood beside him, regarding him with a look that was at once searching and contemptuous.

CHAPTER XII.

A VIGOROUS VULTURE.

THE woman in question was tall, red and robust, with black, Asiatic eyes, and long, dark, shining hair, which partook of the luxuriance displayed throughout her entire person.

Her eyes were the best thing about her, relieving to a great extent the coarse and vulgar aspect of her features.

Her age could not have been less than five-and-forty years, although she took great pains to dress as youthfully as possible.

Her attire was costly, rather than elegant, but was showy and elaborate, and not at all becoming to her face and figure.

She was literally bedizened with valuable jewelry, having immense solitaire diamonds in her ears, the heaviest kind of rings upon more than half of her fingers, and massive bracelets upon both wrists.

"Mrs. Levison!" cried the doctor, starting to his feet, with an aspect similar to that with which he would have recognized the presence of a rattlesnake. "You here? You know very well that I have forbidden you to ever set foot in this house!"

"Forbidden?" repeated the visitress, while her scornful glances grew savage. "That's a big word for you to carry around with you, Doctor Wyville."

"I simply mean that I have pointed out to you how much such visits are to be avoided," amended the doctor, with an appearance of bowing to the inevitable.

"Ah, that's more like it," said Mrs. Levison, with a modification of manner which responded to the change in the doctor's language.

To any one witnessing the scene, the contrast between the couple would have been striking.

"And now—why are you here?" demanded the doctor uneasily, and with an attentive eye and ear to his surroundings.

"My dear doctor," returned Mrs. Levison with a smile, "you will never cease to be a gawky, I fear, in your dealings with woman-kind. For a man who thinks so much of them, and who is so poorly calculated to please them, it's very unfortunate."

"You are only too well aware, Esther," assured the doctor, with an attempt at a smile little short of hideous, "that I love no woman save you!"

"In any case, I am not jealous," said Mrs. Levison, as she quietly seated herself, "but I'd like to see you have a little more manners. After waiting in vain eight long days to see you, I take the trouble of coming here to see what has become of you, and how you are getting on, and you receive me with frowns and reproaches. These are mistakes Doctor Wyville, which should be rectified. As a rule, men run after me, and not I after them!"

"And as a rule, too, you don't let them tire themselves out with running," ventured the doctor, with sullen wrathfulness.

"That's my business," said the visitress, with calm haughtiness. "What I want of you is an explanation of your silence."

"Nothing is easier to give," returned the doctor, whose entire frame trembled with a fever of terror, jealousy, hatred, or passion, or all these things together.

"Then let's have it."

"I have had to go out of town for three days, to attend a critical case, and I did not get home till two o'clock this morning. I lay down for an hour after my return, but I did not catch a wink of sleep, and if I'm now stirring, despite all my fatigue, it's only because of my iron will."

"The patient is very wealthy, then?" queried Mrs. Levison, without heeding in the least the details which concerned the doctor personally.

Dr. Wyville stared at the visitress, as if at a loss to make sense of her observation.

"I refer to the subject of your long visit to the country," she proceeded. "It's well known that Doctor Wyville does not disturb himself for beggars, but only for patients who can hand out fees of first-class proportions."

A bitter smile curled the thin pale lips of Doctor Wyville, and a tremor shook his form.

He comprehended the woman, and realized to what she was coming.

"Did you save her—your patient?" she added.

"I did."

"So much the better. She must have paid liberally. Nothing could be more timely!"

The tremor of the doctor's frame became still more marked.

"The truth is," added the vigorous vulture, "I am greatly in want of money!"

"Again, Esther?"

"There's another of your awkward phrases!"

"Nevertheless I have just experienced a sweeping disaster, and for the moment I haven't a dollar!"

"I take all that for what it is worth," said Mrs. Levison. "To talk to me about not having money is simply a piece of impertinence!"

"Not at all, Esther. It is simply a hard and terrible fact. I have never refused you money when I had it. In a few days I may have some, but for the present—"

Mrs. Levison raised one of her jeweled hands impatiently.

"We're wasting valuable time," she said, in a dry, hard tone. "I must have five thousand dollars!"

"What madness, Esther!"

"I must have that sum instantly."

She arose, with a strange air of menace, anger, and disgust, all blending in a swiftly-gathering fury.

"Have pity, Esther," implored Doctor Wyville, with a sudden change of manner. "Is it not enough that for you I have done a thing I cannot remember without horror and which renders my nights sleepless?"

"Which of them?" mocked the visitress. "Anything of which I am ignorant?"

The question was asked with such emphasis, and the large black eyes of Mrs. Levison glowed so menacingly upon him, that Doctor Wyville dropped heavily back into his chair, covering his face with his hands.

"I have wasted my daughter's fortune," he avowed. "The last folly and wickedness of which any father should be guilty."

The visitress shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"All that does not concern me," she said. "I want money, and must have it. If the question between us is not one of finance, what is it? You can hardly suppose that you are one of those favored beings who can be loved for themselves alone?"

"Take care, Esther! Don't drive me to extremities!" cried the doctor, whose wounded vanity caused him to straighten up with grim energy. "I am not handsome, it is true, but I am Doctor John Wyville. Many a woman would not be so oblivious of that fact as you

appear to be. You had better remember the point where you started!"

"Ah, but that is so far behind us," returned the woman, as mockingly as before. "Perhaps you had better remember where our fortunes first became associated. Is it possible that you never think of the young wife of Claude Wyville?"

"Silence!" enjoined the doctor, springing to her side and placing his hand upon her mouth, with such a frightful look upon his visage that she could not help recoiling. "How dare you recall such things?"

"Oh, I'm simply defending myself, that's all, doctor. If you're getting tired of me, you've only to say so, and we'll dissolve partnership."

She turned and moved toward the door.

He placed himself in her path.

"Hear me, Esther," he implored. "Three weeks from now, if you want even ten thousand dollars, you shall have them, but do not worry me between now and that time. I am busy with a very important and paying affair, but I shall not have the returns before the time stated."

"You seem to have forgotten that another payment on the house is coming due, John," said Mrs. Levison, half-reproachfully. "Besides, I have bought a pair of horses and a new carriage, and should be sorry to have my creditors howling for their money."

The doctor clinched his hands so tightly that more than one of his warts left its mark in their hollows.

"Wait a moment," he enjoined.

He pressed a secret opening of his desk, and a drawer flew open.

"See there," he added. "There is all I have by me. Two thousand dollars. Look for yourself."

She had not waited for the invitation.

Looking over his shoulders, she had seen for herself. "These two thousand you can have," he resumed, with a sigh. "They'll meet the payment on the house, and leave you a balance. As to your horses and carriage, you can send your creditors to me, and I will arrange with them."

"Very well, John. We'll leave these matters upon this basis."

She took the money, counting it carefully, and secured it in her pocketbook, which was already full of gold and greenbacks.

"I will send Mr. Brail for the balance of my five thousand," she said. "It was Mr. Brail who called my attention to the horses and carriage."

The doctor quailed at the name.

"You all hang together, do you?" he exclaimed.

"Why not? We're all related. Rather distant connections, to be sure, but we're all one family in the tribe of Judas, especially in our dealings with the Gentiles. Good-bye, John."

And she strode away as abruptly as she had come.

"What a life!" murmured the doctor, when she had vanished. "The bottomless pit would be preferable. But if I succeed in my projects, as I certainly shall, I'll soon put an end to all these horrors!"

He turned with unsteady steps to a little dressing-room adjoining his office, and plunged his face and hands repeatedly into a bowl of cold water, carefully wiping them.

Then, feeling that he was more himself again, he returned to his seat at his desk, and touched his call-bell.

"Let them come now," he said, as Tobias made his appearance, "but each in his turn. No favor to any one, whoever he may be."

CHAPTER XIII.

A THIRD DISAGREEABLE VISIT.

THE first visitor introduced by Tobias was a young man of five-and-twenty, whose countenance, we must candidly admit, was so far from being pleasant and sympathetic that it would have readily been pronounced accusatory and menacing.

"Ah, Mr. Fountain, if I mistake not?" was the greeting of Dr. Wyville, after he had mastered a surprise he could not conceal.

He arose and advanced toward the visitor, with a somewhat ambiguous gesture, which might have been interpreted with equal propriety as an offer of his hand, or as an invitation to take a chair conveniently near.

The visitor chose the latter interpretation.

"Yes, I am Mr. Fountain," he said, as he seated himself. "I see that my face is not forgotten, notwithstanding the years which have passed since our last meeting."

"A physician never forgets the face of any one with whom he has had dealings," said Dr. Wyville. "But I see that you have been informed of the calamity which has overtaken you, and which my best skill and devotion were powerless to conjure. The loss of a mother, even when she has been stern and unjust toward her son, is always a cruel blow to any man who possesses a heart. At such a moment she forgets all his wrongs, especially if they are due to the infirmities and misfortunes of the afflicted relative, and remembers only those er-

rors and mistakes of which he himself has been guilty."

"Doctor Wyville," returned the visitor, who had listened to these remarks with an involuntary frown, and even with a visible irritation, "I am not here to discuss or consider the conduct of my mother, or my sentiments toward her. I arrived from New York only two or three hours ago, and I have just paid a visit to my mother's lawyer, by whose advice I have come here to ask you—"

"For my bill, I suppose?" interrupted the doctor, with a disagreeable smile. "Naturally, your mother being dead, and no further services required of me, I have been for some days past anticipating a call from you, and the bill is quite ready."

The visitor raised his hand in angry protestation, and gained his feet, the gaze of the two men meeting, the one menacing and excited, while the other was coldly calm.

Mr. Fountain, who seemed to have all he could do to master his wrath, was not long in reaching that result, however, and he then said sternly:

"I have come to ask you, doctor Wyville, what has become of the fortune of my mother, of which you are well-known to have been the only and final custodian?"

The doctor flushed hotly, looking searchingly at his visitor.

"Is it to me that you propose such a problem as that, Mr. Fountain?" he asked.

"Yes, sir—to you!"

"Then all I have to say is, my dear sir," answered the doctor, "that I haven't the slightest idea what has become of your mother's fortune. I am not even aware that she had a fortune, especially during the last few years of her life. I am a doctor and not a lawyer. All I know is that I have treated your mother many a long year, and that I have never received a cent for either medicine or attendance. And now, when she is dead, and her son comes to me, I have a right to expect his best thanks, and not a demand of this sort, which is not only strange but as foolish as unjust, and one I cannot accept or permit for a moment."

As he ceased speaking, the doctor indicated by a gesture that the interview was ended.

"One moment, sir," said young Fountain, without showing any intention of leaving. "My demand may appear strange and insulting, but is none the less justified by circumstances which cannot be poohpoohed out of existence. My mother, without being rich, had ample means to live upon, and to live at her ease. During the later years of her life, she had no visitor, no adviser, no one in whom to confide, save you, Doctor Wyville. At her death, all her money, every bond, everything of every sort that had any value, had totally disappeared, with the exception of a hundred dollars she had retained on her person for her funeral expenses. Every son and heir, in my place, would ask you the same questions I do. The close and exclusive character of your relations to my mother warrant me in supposing that you can give me many details concerning her later days of which I must necessarily be ignorant, as a consequence of my long absence from this city."

"That absence, sir," returned the doctor, with well simulated dignity, "is perhaps the worst feature of the situation. For you to abandon your home and mother in the way you did was an act that almost any impartial mind would condemn severely. But I have seen too much of human weakness and error not to be indignant, and I'm not at all disposed to quarrel with you for your hasty and ill-timed suspicions. If it is to me as a friend of your mother that you apply for information, and if it is a history of what has taken place in your absence that you would like to know, I am entirely at your service, if you appeal to my courtesy and good will, and I am ready to tell you all that a physician is permitted to reveal in such circumstances. It will, in fact, be a pleasure for me to respond to all your legitimate demands in this matter."

"I am glad to hear it," returned the visitor, as coldly as before, but with less fire and menace. "I await your explanations."

"Ah, a thousand pardons, my dear sir," pursued the doctor. "I cannot go into these matters here, nor to-day. You have come here at a moment when I am receiving my patients. You have seen for yourself how many are waiting to consult me with the hope of receiving relief for their pains and afflictions. The time I devote to them is sacred, and my professional duty, to say nothing of humanity, would not allow me to waste these precious moments in the discussion of mere business matters."

"Very well, sir," replied Mr. Fountain. "I have no wish to be less conciliating than yourself. I'll not insist for to-day. But I will return at some moment when you will be more at liberty."

"And I shall be prompt to receive you, sir," assured the doctor. "After what has been said, I am just as anxious to tell you all I know as you can possibly be in have this information."

The visitor inclined himself in silence and took his departure.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CRIME OF THE DAY.

THE more Nora Wyville considered the mysterious letter she had found upon the mantelpiece of her chamber, the more probable did it seem that the missive had been sent to her by Hubert Garson.

He was the only one she loved, and the only one who loved her.

Hence he alone could have made use of those peculiar expressions.

Then why didn't he sign his name, and plainly inform her of the exact nature of the occurrences at which he had hinted?

The maiden's first impulse, naturally enough, was to question her maid, but she hesitated to act upon it, for the simple reason that such a measure would uncover the secret of her heart far more than was wise or desirable.

Besides, one had only to wait a few hours, and an explanation of the letter would come in the event itself to which it referred.

A final reading of the document strengthened her conviction that Hubert alone could have written it, and this conclusion inspired her with more joy and hope than apprehension.

"He has not forgotten me!" she said to herself, with brightening eyes. "And may not all this mean that he will be here in person this evening?"

The mere hope of such a return was enough to thrill her with a keener joy than she had ever before experienced.

"Of course I will respect his wishes," she said to herself. "I will be worthy of his love and confidence."

Applying a lighted match to the letter, all that remained of it, in another minute, was a tiny speck of ashes upon the hearth.

"And now to wait patiently for what there is behind it," was the thought with which she descended to the parlors.

An hour or two glided away almost unheeded so busy was the fair girl in seeing that all the measures taken by Mrs. Mawney and Gertie responded to her wishes, and then she took possession of one of the sofas in the sitting-room, in order to rest a few minutes before the invited guests should begin to make their appearance.

Here she was soon joined by her father.

"Don't forget, Tobias," enjoined the doctor, looking back, as he reached the door, "that you are to introduce my nephew, Percy Wyville, the very moment he makes his appearance."

"At just what hour do you expect him, sir?" asked the precise Tobias.

"That I cannot say exactly," replied the doctor. "There is almost a constant succession of trains between New York and Philadelphia. I have telegraphed my nephew that we will count upon him for the dinner at the latest."

The doctor glanced at his watch.

"Half-past six," he ejaculated. "If my nephew does not arrive sooner, he can be here at quarter-past seven. We'll not sit down to dinner till half-past seven. See that the necessary orders are given accordingly."

Absorbed in her thoughts of Hubert Garson, Nora had given little attention to the nearness of her cousin's arrival, but these words of her father and Tobias aroused her to a keen realization of the situation.

She arose briskly.

"You see, papa," she said, approaching him, as he turned toward her, "that I have followed your advice to look my best."

"Sure enough," responded the doctor, as his eyes kindled with admiration. "I have never seen you look so charming. What eyes! What a sweet face! What lovely tints in your cheeks!"

He drew her to his heart, pressing upon her forehead a kiss that had something almost convulsive in its energy.

But Nora hardly noticed his agitation.

She had only one thought at that moment.

"He, too, will think me beautiful!"

"Here are the evening papers," observed Gertie, who entered at this moment, and placed three or four local journals on a stand near one of the windows.

"Ah, the papers!" exclaimed the doctor, with a keen and sudden interest he had never before exhibited. "I wonder if our Washington case is reported?"

He seized the first paper which came to his hand, and unfolded it with a single energetic movement.

His face had become livid, as if this newspaper must contain some report which was destined to enter into his whole future existence.

But Nora seized the paper laughingly and attempted to take it from him.

"What do you want of that?" she asked.

"Nora!" thundered the doctor, literally glaring at her, as he clutched the paper with such vigor that it was torn in two.

"Why, what ails you, papa?" continued the maiden, in astonishment, as she bestowed a more critical attention upon him. "You scare me! Your face is like a ghost's! I've never seen you look so! Are you ill?"

"Excuse me, dear," returned the doctor, loosening his grip upon the torn journal, and allowing its fragments to fall to the ground. Not

ill—no, but utterly worn out, and as nervous as a wildcat! I'm not myself after several such days and nights as I have just passed. Not a wink of sleep last night, and not a moment of repose to-day! No wonder I'm upset!"

"Sure enough," murmured Nora, with tender solicitude. "I'm afraid all this excitement about the dinner and reception will be too much for you!"

"Oh, not at all," and he extended his hand to take another paper. "It will rest me to glance a few moments at the news of the day."

"No, no, papa!" protested Nora. "You will have time enough to read them later in the evening, before you go to bed. What can there be in the papers to interest you? You are not a politician, nor are you a speculator in stocks, and of course you don't care to read of all those murders and other crimes with which the average 'News' or 'Times' is crowded!"

"What an idea!" cried the doctor, forcing a laugh.

"Then let them alone for the present, my dear father," pursued Nora. "Let's visit the parlors, the dining-room, and even the kitchen, to see that all the arrangements for the evening are just what they should be. We have barely time to take a look about us before the guests will arrive. Come, come, Doctor Wyville! Are you not going to obey your daughter?"

How smilingly she looked at him!

With what a pretty assumption of authority!

How lovingly her arms stole around him!

"All right, Nora! I obey," he answered, with a last wistful glance at the "forbidden fruit" of the moment.

"Then give me your arm, papa!"

And away they went together.

By the time they had finished their inspection of the different apartments, a ring was heard at the door, and they took their way to the parlors.

The guests of the evening had begun to appear.

In less than a quarter of an hour the entire nine, gentlemen and ladies, who, with the expected nephew, and the doctor and Nora, were to occupy the twelve places at the table, were all present.

As is usual in such cases, after the first greetings were over, there was very little to say. The beauty of Nora, the bad weather, and the other salient features of the situation had all received due attention when one of the lady guests turned to her nearest neighbor and queried:

"Is there anything new to-day?"

"No, nothing to speak of, so far as I know," was the reply, "unless it is the latest murder, the crime of the day! But all that has become as commonplace as snow in winter or lamb or mince sauce in the spring!"

"The latest murder! Where has that occurred? In Philadelphia?"

"No, in New York! Or rather in one of the suburbs of New York—a place called Weehawken!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE TWELFTH GUEST.

THERE were present five gentlemen, all of middle age, or older, and four ladies, three of whom had come with their husbands, while the fourth was a girl of about Nora's age, who had been her schoolmate and roommate during several seasons.

Among the five gentlemen were two doctors, a journalist, a manufacturer, and a professor in one of the leading universities.

The lady who had asked if there was anything new was Mrs. Edson, the wife of the professor, and the mother of the young girl aforesaid, who had taken her place beside Nora, as was natural, and was exchanging her girlish ideas with her.

The gentleman who had replied to Mrs. Edson was Doctor Hobbie, a journalist of good social repute, who was widely known and appreciated.

At the moment when the question of Mrs. Edson was asked and answered, a profound silence reigned in the parlor, save for the murmur of the voices of the two young girls.

"In Weehawken?" echoed Mrs. Edson. "If such things must occur, it suits me better to have them take place at a distance, for the papers have been so full lately of all sorts of abominable outrages in and around Philadelphia, that I, who have always boasted of having nerves of iron, have really begun to get nervous."

"I see, Mrs. Edson," said Doctor Arnold, one of the two medical guests, "that you are too much like the rest of us to sacrifice yourself in the interest of others."

"Is there the usual amount of horrible details?" asked another of the ladies, whose glances attested that she would be only too eager to hear anything of that nature.

"I regret, my dear madam," declared the manufacturer, "that I have merely glanced at the article, but I should say that the details are sufficiently terrible and romantic to suit the most fastidious lover of the horrible."

"Indeed!" cried a chorus of voices.

A general interest in the subject appeared to be awakened.

"The victim, it seems," pursued the manufacturer, "is a young man, who has been knocked on the head with some blunt instrument, and has then been thrown from a perpendicular cliff two or three hundred feet high, falling upon a railroad track, where he has been duly cut in pieces by a passing train."

The cry of horror that succeeded can be imagined.

"Some personal vengeance, I suppose," observed the professor.

"No. It is thought to be a case of simple robbery. The unfortunate young man is said to have received several hundred or several thousand dollars during the day, but not a single dime was found upon the body."

"When was the crime committed?" demanded Mrs. Edson. "In broad daylight, no doubt?"

"No; late last night, and in one of the loneliest spots imaginable, where no one lives, and where no one ever goes, and this fact gives a strange air of mystery to the whole business, for no one can imagine why the unfortunate should be at such a spot at such a moment."

Dr. Wyville had listened in silence to these various remarks, his glances turning searchingly from one speaker to another, but he now suddenly took part in the conversation.

"Is the name of the victim given?" he demanded.

"No, sir," answered the journalist. "It seems to be known, but it has been suppressed at the request of the police."

"There is no use of asking you if the assassin has been arrested," said Mrs. Edson. "That would be a little too much to hope."

"And such a question would be too suggestive of the questioner's recent advent from the rural districts, and of the hayseed lingering in his hair!"

"The arrest of the assassin would certainly be quite contrary to all the usual proceedings in such cases."

"As also against all the usages of polite society."

"The blind goddess is no longer love, it seems."

"No; justice now wears the bandages on her eyes to some purpose."

"Without even a dog and a string to guide her in her investigations."

Every one having thus contributed his or her commentary to the general view of the occurrence—every one save Dr. Wyville, who stood with his back to the company, looking out of a window, and the two young girls—the journalist added:

"Sure enough, the murderer has not been arrested, but—"

"But what!" cried several voices, eagerly.

"But the police are upon his track, and hope soon to have him!"

A single stroke resounded from the clock on the mantle-piece.

The hour was quarter past seven.

Dr. Wyville and Nora looked up.

"The hour has come, papa," said the latter, "but my cousin is not here."

"We'll wait for him until half past," returned the doctor.

"It would be odd enough, wouldn't it," said the journalist, "if the hero of the evening should fail to appear?"

"Are you sure that he will come, doctor?" inquired Mrs. Edson.

"Certainly—that is to say, I have every hope of his coming. He has wired me and written that he intends to be here this evening, and I have telegraphed him that we shall expect him."

"Has he replied?"

"No."

"Then it's possible—"

"Oh, if he hadn't intended to come, he would have hastened to say so, knowing that we should otherwise count upon him."

"That's evident."

"We may look for him, therefore, from one minute to another, although he appears to be a little behind time."

"He landed at New York, I believe?" demanded the manufacturer.

"Yes."

"I hope no accident has befallen him—as is so frequently the case with young strangers arriving there," said Mrs. Edson.

"Would it not be strange if he should turn out to be the young man who has been murdered?" exclaimed Nora's schoolmate, with the careless thoughtlessness of her years.

"Eugenia! are you crazy?" cried her mother, vehemently. "How dare you make such a silly suggestion!"

The young girl blushed to the roots of her hair, hiding her face in a handkerchief.

"You've never seen him, this nephew, I believe, doctor?" said Dr. Arnold, with the intention of effacing the glacial impression which had been cast over the assemblage by Miss Eugenia's unfortunate observation.

"Never," was the reply. "He was born in Nova Scotia, and has always remained there. But I was tenderly attached to his father."

"He is dead?"

"Many years ago."

"And his mother?"

"She is dead, also. We are now his only near relatives. It is thus that whole families vanish. Of three brothers, I am the only one living. But my nephew will doubtless soon be as dear to me as a son."

A singular alteration was remarked in the doctor's voice. He passed an unsteady hand over his visage, which was bathed in perspiration, and over his parched lips.

A brief silence succeeded.

It was easy to comprehend what would naturally be the doctor's emotions at the recollection of those he had lost, and especially at the thought of soon embracing the only relative left him and Nora from a once numerous family.

And there were few of those present who did not secretly admire the abnegation the doctor was exhibiting in thus feasting the arrival of one whose existence had kept a million and a half from becoming the inheritance of the father and daughter.

The silence was broken by two silvery strokes from the clock.

The time was half-past seven.

Even as the guests realized the fact, the door leading from the dining-room opened, and Tobias appeared, firm and solemn.

"Dinner is ready," he announced, with a profound inclination to the doctor and Nora.

"I begin to fear my nephew will not be with us," said the doctor, nervously, giving expression to the preoccupation of all present. "I am very sorry. But it's always so with these wild young fellows. They're never exact. But we must make the best of it."

He offered his arm to Mrs. Edson, while Nora took that of Dr. Arnold, and thus the father and daughter led the way to the table. All the guests were promptly in their place, a single chair only remaining empty.

"Take away that chair, Tobias," enjoined the doctor. "Nothing is more gloomy than to have an empty place at such a moment."

He had become singularly pale, and his voice was husky and thick, while his gestures were awkward and irrelevant.

All the guests, in fact, seemed more or less ill at ease, as a result of their keen sympathy with the doctor's disappointment.

The repast, therefore, although magnificent, was characterized by no little silence and constraint.

The doctor and Nora hardly ate or drank, and there were times when the glances of Dr. Wyville seemed to become flames, as if they were reflections of a deadly conflagration which raged within.

At length champagne was served, and the journalist raised his glass.

"Let us not forget our absent friend," he said, "and without holding him too strictly to account for his failure to appear, I take great pleasure in proposing his health!"

Every one's glass was raised.

That of Dr. Wyville had already touched his parched lips, when the door leading from the parlors was thrown open.

"Mr. Percy Wyville!" was the announcement that came from the lips of Tobias.

The glass of the doctor was crushed like an egg-shell in the hand that held it and its fragments, with the wine it had contained, covered the table.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

A YOUNG man appeared on the threshold, deeply agitated, and extremely pale.

He was attired like a traveler who has just landed, and who has been in too great a hurry to arrive to wait for his wardrobe, or to make those changes a brief delay would have permitted.

At sight of him, an inarticulate cry escaped Nora, but no one paid the least attention to it, all eyes being fixed upon the new-comer, for whose arrival every one had ceased to hope. And even if everybody's attention had not been absorbed in an intense desire to see this young nephew and millionaire, who arrived thus unexpectedly from the Provinces, the aspect of Dr. Wyville would have been quite sufficient to prevent them from giving a thought to anything else.

At the name of Percy Wyville he had turned toward the door, livid, breathless, frightful to see, as if paralyzed by some nameless horror, or as if dominated by some vision which suspended in him the functions of life; so completely consternated and prostrated that he forgot to lower his hand, which had been severely cut by the splinters of the broken glass, and from which the blood was dripping.

As if dazzled by the light, the young man had halted a moment near the door, but not without sending a swift glance over all the faces and forms present, and with a keenness of gaze which caused his dark eyes to present a marked contrast with his pale visage.

But nowhere did his gaze linger, save upon the features of Nora, and the next instant he advanced toward the doctor, saying, in a voice that was firm and assured:

"My uncle, I believe?"

And he opened his arms, quickening his steps, as if for a friendly embrace.

The gaze of all present turned upon the doctor, and there was a suppressed cry of wonder upon the lips of nearly every one at the sight he presented, with his features drawn into a death-like rigidity, and yet wearing a hideous scowl of menace and fury.

A moment or two the doctor thus faced the new-comer, with the air of one staring at some dreadful apparition, and then he sprang from his chair, placing it between him and the twelfth guest, and took one or two steps backward, as if ready to fly for his life.

"My dear uncle," pursued the young man, halting near the table, "I am a little behind time, I see, and it even begins to look as if you had failed to receive my letter and telegram. But here I am, sound and well, with no other drawback than this costume of a traveler, and I hope you will excuse me for the delay in my arrival."

He made a movement toward embracing the doctor, but the latter repulsed him with the violence of desperation.

"Stand back!" he gasped, in a half-suffocated voice. "I don't know you!"

"That's true enough, my dear uncle," admitted the new-comer, whose mien became more and more self-possessed with every word he uttered. "You know me as little as I know you, since this is our first meeting, but I am said to resemble your brother, my poor father, and I am not without the hope that you will recall him, even after all these years, with sufficient clearness to see that I am his living image."

The doctor was still slowly retreating, looking as terrible as ever, with a frothy fringe gathering at the junction of his bloodless lips.

"Come, come, my dear uncle," cried the new-comer, forcing a smile, "calm yourself! I thought you expected me. If I had supposed that the delay in my arrival would cause you such an extraordinary surprise, I would have taken care to break the news to you more gently."

"What's the matter with you, my dear friend?" asked Dr. Arnold, as he took his colleague by the arm. "Are you ill?"

"Yes—no," stammered Nora's father. "I do not know this man! Neither does he know me! He's some impostor. Some deadly—some daring—"

The words died away in his throat.

"What can ail you, uncle, to stare at me in such a manner?" asked the new-comer. "One would think that you take me for a ghost, and that you believed Percy Wyville to be dead!"

"He lies!" shrieked the doctor, trembling in every limb. "Why should I have any such belief as that? He lies!"

"In good truth," said the twelfth guest of the evening, as he looked calmly around upon the ladies and gentlemen who had been invited to meet him, "I've narrowly missed being assassinated—as I have just learned by reading the evening papers. A poor young fellow I encountered on my travels, and with whom I struck up a pleasing acquaintance, as was quite natural, has been cruelly murdered by some unknown miscreant, almost in my presence, and there are various indications to show that the assassin has made a mistake, and that I am really the one he intended to strike. But all this must still be unknown to you, my dear uncle," he added, as his glances came back to the doctor's face, "for no names are given in the papers—"

"Papa! dear papa!" interrupted Nora, as she sprang toward the doctor. "Tell me what ails you! You frighten me!"

The doctor was indeed a frightful object to look at.

His eyes staring and bloodshot; his mouth opened to utter words which would not come; his hands and arms beating the air wildly—he would have fallen backward headlong if Nora and Dr. Arnold, who were near him, had not extended their hands to his support.

In an instant everything was in confusion, everybody arising from the table and surrounding the doctor, while his second colleague hastened to give him all possible succor.

"He must carry him to his room," said the latter.

The two doctors took him under the arms, half-carrying, half-guiding him, and hastened from the dining-room, preceded by Nora, and followed by the new-comer, who said nothing to any one, and who seemed inconsolable for the terrible effects of his unexpected arrival.

A few moments later Dr. Wyville lay on his bed, with his eyes rolled back so far in their orbits that only their whites were visible, and the two doctors proceeded to bolster up his head as high as possible.

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Nora, between her sobs, "is he in danger? Is he dying?"

"Not at all, my dear child," replied Dr. Arnold, who had already felt the pulse of the patient and examined him critically. "It's a simple nervous spasm, of an epileptic character, and always gives one that frightful aspect. He'll soon be himself again."

"But what can be the cause of it?" asked the nephew.

"Your sudden appearance when we were no

longer expecting you, at the close of a hearty repast, has suddenly arrested the digestive functions, that's all, my dear sir," explained the doctor. "I have seen this thing many a time in very similar circumstances. It's quite possible for joy to be as dangerous as terror. A cup or two of strong tea, and he'll be all right again."

"I'll hasten to get it," said Nora, with trembling eagerness.

"Do so, my dear child. Ah! he's coming out of it. The worst is past already."

"My dear Mr. Wyville," said Dr. Arnold, addressing the nephew, "you had better retire from your uncle's view for a moment. The fewer there are about him when he comes out of that awkward attack the better it will be for him. To see you, who have been the cause of this crisis, would be especially likely to retard his recovery."

"But of course we will recall you, sir," supplemented the other colleague of Dr. Wyville, "just as soon as it shall be proper to do so."

"I conform to your suggestions, gentlemen," returned the nephew, "and I am sure you will comprehend, without any formal declarations from me, how keenly I regret what has happened."

The two doctors inclined themselves cordially in response to his salutation, and he withdrew with the calm dignity of a man whose conscience is wholly at ease.

The next instant he encountered Nora, who had dispatched Gertie to the kitchen for the tea demanded, and was now following to get it as soon as possible.

At sight of him she blushed scarlet, and came to an abrupt halt, almost at a loss what to say or do, as she remembered the injunctions of the mysterious letter.

"A thousand thanks, dear Nora," he whispered, bending near her. "I will explain all at the first favorable moment."

The maiden inclined her head understandingly, turning upon him her large black eyes, in which he easily read the joy his presence caused her, although it was modified by the anxiety she felt for her father's condition.

Another instant, and she had vanished, hurrying in the direction Gertie had taken, and leaving the nephew to take his way to the dining-room at his leisure.

When Nora returned to her father, a few minutes later, she found him sitting up in bed, with his eyes wide open and staring vacantly into space, while he seemed to be utterly oblivious of the presence and proceedings of his two colleagues, one of whom chafed his hands and wrists energetically, while the other bathed his forehead in cologne.

The moment he saw his daughter, however, he heaved a profound sigh, and held out his arms to her, at the same time sweeping aside those who had been caring for him, and assuming the expression, so to speak, of a scared child which cannot recover its equanimity except under the protection of its mother.

This sentiment was so clear that Dr. Arnold hastened to take from Nora's hands the tray of which she was the bearer, and to say:

"You, my dear, are the one he desires to see, and I have no doubt your presence and voice will do more for him than everything else."

He made way for her approach, as did his colleague.

"Here I am, papa," she said, as she threw her arms caressingly around the doctor. "You are feeling better, I see. What joy to feel that you will soon be well again!"

The doctor passed his arm around her waist, drawing her to his side convulsively.

"Do not leave me," he murmured.

"Of course not, papa," she returned, soothingly. "Here I am, and I will remain as long as you please."

"Thanks, darling. You are an angel. No one seeing you will believe a word of it!"

"A word of what, papa?"

"Nothing! Silence! I was talking without being conscious of the fact!"

The two doctors exchanged a few words in mere whispers.

"Who is there?" suddenly cried Nora's father, as he sheltered himself behind her.

"Two of our best friends, papa—Doctor Arnold and—"

"Ah! are you sure, child?"

"Certainly. Look for yourself."

She changed her position a little, thus enabling him to see his colleagues.

"You are right," he said, his aspect becoming more calm.

"The tea is now ready, John," said Dr. Arnold, stepping nearer and handing a cup of the beverage to Nora.

"Drink, papa," was her injunction, as she passed the cup to the doctor.

He complied without a word, and the tea seemed to do him good, his gaze becoming more clear and steady.

"Good! that is a move in the right direction," exclaimed Dr. Arnold, with visible joy and relief. "You are as nervous and impressionable as any young girl, my dear friend. The joy of seeing your nephew has arrested your digestion,

and you have given your charming daughter a fine scare!"

"Yes, yes, that's it!" exclaimed the doctor. Then he listened intently.

"What's all that noise I hear?" he demanded, his terrors appearing to come back to him.

"The guests are beginning to arrive, papa—those we invited to the reception," explained Nora.

"Ah, our guests! I must hurry to get up, to receive them!"

"Are you able to do so?" asked Nora, as her glances sought the faces of her father's two colleagues.

"In a quarter of an hour—yes, answered Dr. Arnold. "But not sooner. He must keep quiet a few minutes longer, and take another cup of tea."

"My dear friends," suddenly said Dr. Wyville, "I am greatly obliged for your kindly assistance. I am better now. It was so hot in that dining-room, and I've allowed myself to be pressed with too much work, which has even robbed me of my sleep. Leave me a few minutes, and I will come to you. Let no one be alarmed, please, but make my excuses to our guests."

"Do not worry about that, my dear Wyville," said Dr. Arnold. "We'll make everything right below, and see you a few minutes hence in the parlor!"

The two doctors withdrew, leaving Nora with her father, who held her by the hand.

"Where is he?" demanded the doctor, as soon as the couple were alone.

"Who, papa?"

"He!"

"My cousin?"

"Your cousin! Ah, yes—it's true!"

"In the parlor, doubtless."

"He has not gone?"

"Of course not."

"And what has he said?"

"Nothing, except that he was very sorry to have caused you such a violent surprise."

The doctor was silent a moment, appearing to reflect intently.

Then he gently pushed his daughter toward the door.

"Go and tell him to come here," he said, in a hollow voice. "I wish to see him!"

"Are you not afraid, papa, that his presence will excite you again?"

"I must see him!"

"Wait a few minutes, papa—till you are stronger," pleaded Nora.

"What! you won't go?" cried the doctor, regarding her almost menacingly as he sprung out of bed. "Then I'll go myself!"

His aspect was still so terrible that Nora recoiled in affright.

"I will go, papa," she hastened to declare. "Be calm! I will tell him!"

"Then go, and be quick about it," enjoined the doctor, as he began striding to and fro impetuously, with the air of a beast of prey shut up in a cage a great deal too small for it.

Nora withdrew without another word.

She knew the violent character of her father too well to offer any further opposition to his wishes or to suggest any further delay.

A couple of minutes later, she ushered the new-comer into the chamber of the doctor, with whom he found himself face to face.

CHAPTER XVII.

TO WHAT THEIR INTERVIEW LED.

DURING the two minutes in question, the doctor, left to himself, had apparently been able to partly master his emotions, for the visitor found him relatively calm, with a stern countenance, and with the aspect of a man who is prepared to do and dare all things to carry his point.

But his eyes gleamed with a phosphorescent brilliancy which announced that the tempest of his soul, although no longer raging without, was as active as ever within.

With a single glance as he stepped into the room, the nephew took in all the qualities and capacities of the grim figure before him, and realized the silent menaces of which he was the object.

For this reason, after closing carefully the door behind him, and assuring himself that no one could see them or hear what they said, he remained watchfully on his guard, as he dropped into a chair.

"Now let us talk," he said.

With this he produced a revolver, which he cocked and laid upon a table near him in full view, and without taking his hand from the weapon.

The countenance of Dr. Wyville expressed the wonder with which he noted these proceedings.

His brow clouded, but he neither moved nor spoke, contenting himself with a keen scrutiny of this singular nephew who arrived in his uncle's presence in such remarkable and even "questionable shape."

A long and profound silence succeeded, during which the two men thus stared at each other.

Each seemed to wait for the other to speak.

"My dear uncle," finally said the nephew, in a low tone, as if he remembered the old proverb

about walls having ears, "your welcome is of a nature to cause me some surprise, and, I may as well add, of a kind which can hardly fail to surprise everybody, to such an extent as to be very dangerous for both of us, and especially for you!"

He paused to mark the effect of his words.

The doctor neither stirred nor offered to make any response.

"What! you announce with great noise and show the arrival of a nephew, the son of your only brother," resumed the visitor. "You write him with your own hand in the most affectionate terms, that he has become the sole heir of Claude Wyville's fortune. You congratulate him upon his rare situation of millionaire at one-and-twenty, and you add, in substance: 'Hasten to us as soon as you can. I am impatient to see you. Make my home your home. I will be a second father to you.' And when your servant announces me, in the presence of a dozen witnesses, you declare that I am an impostor, and repulse me with every sign of horror, terror and fury. When I come to you, eager to embrace my only surviving uncle, you exclaim: 'I do not know you.' And even at this moment, you regard me with eyes which would be my death if they could dispatch bullets as readily as can this plaything in my hand. This sort of conduct has no especial importance, so long as we are alone, but it will be awkward and unfortunate for us both if this trifling should be carried further in the presence of witnesses. It will not be easy to make them believe always that the trouble is an indigestion."

"Who are you?" demanded the doctor, with a tremor of terror.

"What a strange question! Who am I; my dear uncle? I am your nephew, and the least sense of reflection on your part will tell you that it cannot possibly be otherwise."

The speaker arose quietly, still grasping his weapon, and stepped nearer to the doctor, in order to make himself heard with the lightest possible whisper.

"If I am not your nephew, Percy Wyville," he added, it is simply because Percy Wyville was murdered last night in Weehawken!"

Dr. Wyville recoiled as if a dagger had been thrust into his vitals.

"Ah!" he gasped. "What would you say?"

"Simply, that I was there!"

"There!"

"Simply that I saw you!"

The doctor recoiled still further, looking as pale and scared as at the moment of the nephew's arrival.

"I am the man who seized you after you had thrown your victim over the cliff," pursued the young man sternly, "and who released you in horror and consternation at the instant of recognizing your identity!"

For a moment or two the doctor stood rigid and crisped, as if an electric battery had given him a shock, and then he dropped heavily into the chair which had barred his retrograde movement.

"I—I see the point," he gasped. "You are indeed Percy Wyville!"

"There! that's more like it!" commented the nephew, with a mocking laugh. "I cannot comprehend why you have hesitated for even a moment. You must remember, my dear uncle, that you had never seen your nephew, and that, consequently, you are not entitled to declare at seeing me, 'He's some impostor!' How could you know any such thing, even if it were true?"

"Your criticism is well founded," admitted the doctor, without looking up.

"You must remember, too, my dear uncle," pursued the nephew, "that, if Percy Wyville should really be assassinated, you are the first one to whom suspicion would be directed."

"How so?"

"Why, you are the only one who has an interest in his disappearance, inasmuch as he has inherited a million and a half which would have otherwise come to you."

"I see—I've made a mistake!" stammered the doctor, with a shudder.

"Between ourselves," pursued the bogus nephew, "I do not ask you to adore me, or to sing hosannas because I am here. I can even comprehend that you'd like to see me as cold and stiff at this moment as—the body that was discovered this morning at the foot of a precipice in Weehawken! But, all life is a compromise, my dear uncle, and no one save a downright fool will refuse to endure an evil which cannot be cured!"

"That is true," acknowledged the doctor. "But in taking such care to define my position, you must not forget your own. Whoever may be the assassin of—the man found dead in Weehawken, you are henceforth his accomplice!"

"That is a fact which I do not even attempt to deny," returned the nephew. "But it is quite enough to render me tranquil to know that you cannot denounce me without denouncing yourself. After what I saw, it was my duty, I admit, to hand you over to the police, but, instead of taking that course, I have saved both your honor and your life."

"Why?"

"Simply because I could not denounce the father of Nora!"

"Nora!" echoed the doctor, with a wild, questioning glare. "Do you know her?"

"I have long had that honor!"

"Ah, that's how you knew me?"

"Exactly. I have loved your daughter for months past, and that is why I have saved you. You are her father; that is enough!"

The doctor clutched at his necktie, as if suffocating.

"And—and you've been fool enough to think that I would allow you to marry her!" he cried, as his wild glare grew wilder.

"That hope is what has saved you!"

"Fool that you are, then! Hideous fool and knave! As bad as I am! Oh, how I hate you! You, some unknown and sordid reptile, no doubt! You, who have rendered my crime a failure, useless and doubly infamous! Ah, cursed intruder! you do not know that within three days I shall be posted at the Exchange as a man unable to meet his engagements! You do not know that I am on the verge of a bottomless pit of debt, shame, and disgrace! that my private vices and crimes are about to be hawked to the world! that I shall be dishonored both as a man and as a physician! that I shall no longer be able to buy the silence of Mrs. Levison! that the finger of scorn will soon be leveled at me, even if I'm not arrested and tried as a murderer! and that any one of these horrors will suffice to kill my daughter, whose fortune I've squandered!"

The doctor literally frothed with rage and excitement as he finished the torrent of words, half-wail and half-confession, which the situation had wrung from him.

Something akin to pity was blended with the astonishment with which the nephew listened to this unavailing of the black and tortured soul before him, and his tone was as gentle and conciliatory as possible, as he replied:

"There is a way of securing all these interests and conjuring all these perils. To begin with, I will marry Nora—"

"Never!"

"Provided she will have me—"

"Never! never! I'd sooner kill her, and myself afterward!"

"But if she loves me—what then?"

"Nora love you! Impossible!"

"In marrying her, I will settle the million and a half upon her, and recognize you as the custodian of this fortune—"

"You?"

"I have no desire to ever see a dollar of that bloodstained money, and I'll never touch a dollar of it—"

"You, Nora's husband! It is impossible that she can love you!"

At that moment there came a gentle knock at the door.

The two men started as violently as if that knock had been the explosion of a bomb.

"Who's there?" demanded the doctor, struggling to regain his composure.

"Papa," said a sweet voice, "it is I."

"Nora!"

He hastened to admit her.

"How do you feel now, papa?" she asked, regarding him earnestly. "Our guests are getting uneasy. I'm all alone to receive the newcomers—"

She interrupted herself, blushing deeply.

Her gaze had encountered her father's companion.

"My dear Nora," said the nephew, inclining himself with the profoundest respect, and speaking in a voice which vibrated eloquently with affection, "I have just avowed all to your father, my dear uncle. He is aware that I love you. He knows that I came to Philadelphia sooner than I was expected, and that, keeping my identity a secret, I wooed you under an assumed name, you having won my entire heart from the first hour of our meeting!"

"Ah! this is the mystery, is it?" returned the young girl, as a gleam of comprehension illuminated her radiant countenance. "It was wrong of you to deceive me."

It was only for a moment, and because I wanted to be loved for myself alone," protested the nephew. "No evil was intended, as is proven by the fact that I have now demanded your hand of your father, in case you are willing to bless and honor me with this priceless treasure!"

"And what answer have you given, papa?" asked Nora, as she turned to the doctor.

The father remained silent, with the air of being absorbed in the problems thus crowding upon him.

"He has responded," added the nephew, "that he consents to our union, if you love me!"

Stepping nearer, he opened his arms, looking into her fair, candid face, with eyes that were full of a strange tenderness, yearning, and pity.

Another moment, and she lay gently inclosed upon his breast, while she looked up into his face and murmured:

"Percy! dear Percy! I love you with all my heart and soul!"

A quarter of an hour later, Hubert Garson entered the parlors, with Nora upon his arm, and preceded by Dr. John Wyville, who presented the prospective bridegroom to the guests he had invited to meet Percy Wyville.

The substitution of the despairing lover for the young provincial had been accomplished!

But, several hours later, at the dead of night, when all the guests had long been gone, a bowed and trembling figure could have been seen stalking to and fro as restlessly as wearily in the doctor's chamber.

"Who and what is he, in reality?" came from his parched lips, in a husky whisper, as his wondering gaze settled in the direction of the room which had been assigned the accepted nephew. "Whoever he may be to others—to Nora even—to me he is a hideous avenger, a substitute of my victim, a living phantom!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FATEFUL MEETING.

"A GOOD afternoon on which to die!"

This was the thought with which Pauline Munson retired to her small, dark room, in a great tenement-house, in one of the most obscure and infected quarters of the Quaker City.

It was a pleasant conceit, if a strange one, or one wholly without basis.

She felt that it would be nice to have such a sun looking down upon her, and to bask in its beams, as she arose from the earth's darkness, beyond the river of death, and took her way into that everlasting temple which has no shadow.

She had clung to life till the last moment, toiling night and day for a mere substance, so long as work could be had, and had despaired only when all her possessions had passed to the pawn-shop, only when all work had been denied her, only when she had passed nearly two days without food, and every avenue of relief, save those of beggary and shame, seemed closed to her.

The room in question was a mere attic immediately under the roof, and its solitary window was cut in the roof itself, not far from the eaves.

The only objects in this wretched apartment were a wooden chair, a small stand and a straw mattress, the latter occupying a corner of the floor, the rude iron bedstead which had recently supported it being one of the last things Pauline had sold.

The walls of the rooms were as barren as they came from the hands of the builder, save for a few old garments which occupied an angle, and a hanging shelf or two over the mantle-piece.

Entering as noiselessly as slowly, Pauline closed the door behind her and locked it with a sigh that could have been regarded as her last farewell to the world.

There was a chill in the air, even in the sunshine she had been enjoying, for the days had advanced into November, with signs of an early advent of winter, and this chill was much more noticeable in her room than in the open air.

It was much more noticeable, too, by the despairing girl than by most of those around her, for the reason that she had parted with all her outer garments save an old calico dress and a single skirt.

"What a place to die in!" was the remark that shaped itself in her mind, as she looked around. "If I had thought more about it, I would have walked into the country a few miles, and found some quiet brook or pool where I could die and never be found. But it's now too late! I'll finish as I have begun!"

She drew out of a niche in the wall which served as a cupboard, a small sheet-iron stove, or furnace, such as are used by tinmen, and stood it near the mattress.

This receptacle was already filled with charcoal, with a basis of combustibles, the whole representing her latest acquisitions and expenditures.

In other terms, she had prepared for death deliberately, expending for these simple means of self-destruction the last quarter of a dollar she had been able to raise.

All the cracks and gaps of the door and window had previously been filled carefully with pieces of paper and rags, in such a way as to prevent the external air from entering and at the same time retain within the apartment all the carbonic acid of the burning charcoal.

In a word, everything was ready for the sacrifice Pauline Munson had seen slowly but surely approaching, not merely for days and weeks, but for months.

Lighting a match, Pauline applied it to the combustibles within the little stove, watching the flame long enough to be sure that it would ignite the charcoal, and then she extended herself upon her wretched mattress in silence.

What a death was that she was facing!

No friend for whom to leave a few words of explanation.

No relative to whom to send a last farewell—not one!

How alone and lonely she was!

Closing her eyes, with the air of resigning herself to her fate, she breathed a silent prayer for forgiveness, and gave herself up to the first horrible sensations produced by the poisonous vapors she was breathing.

Fiercer and fiercer burned the fire in the little stove, and within a few minutes the attic was a veritable cavern of death.

By this time the respiration of Pauline had become short, quick, and spasmodic.

Her lips became permanently detached from each other, as if to utter some complaint which was not forthcoming.

Her hands became clinched, like those of one drowning.

Her senses were leaving her.

The silence had become absolute.

But suddenly a strange sound invaded the scene from without.

First stealthy footsteps.

Then a more continuous sound, as if some one were creeping on hands and knees.

These sounds did not come from below—neither from the street nor from the lower stories of the tenement—but rather from the skies, or from the roof.

The next instant a step resounded almost exactly over the head of the unconscious sleeper, and then a rasping sort of sound attested that some one had slid down the roof to the window.

Then followed a crash and a clattering sound, such as only the breaking and falling of glass can produce, and a human figure appeared at the hole in the window, while a flood of cold air invaded the apartment, as a consequence of the rapid escape of the carbonic acid that was destroying the life of the sleeper.

Clinging to the sill of the window, the man in question uttered a suppressed cry of jubilation and relief.

"They can hardly have ventured to follow me over that dangerous route," he muttered, panting for breath. "For the moment I have given them the slip, and if this attic is as deserted as it looks—"

The sentence was not finished.

The speaker had caught a breath of the deadly odor emanating from the hole he had made in the window.

"Heavens! what can this mean?" he ejaculated, under his breath. "Some one trying to take leave of the world in the latest French fashion!"

A moment he continued to cling to the window-sill, first peering into the attic, and then looking around, as if undecided what course to take.

Then a sound in the direction from which he had come, or a fancy that he had heard something in that quarter, incited him to take the most feasible horn of the dilemma, and he availed himself of the hole he had made to cross the sill of the window and let himself lightly down into the attic.

For a moment he almost regretted that he had taken this course, so strong was the odor that reached him from the burning charcoal, but a glance told him that he could lower the upper sash from the top, and no sooner had he executed this measure than a sufficiency of fresh air reached him from the exterior to decide him to remain.

The first thing that caught his eye was the little iron stove, as active as ever with its deadly operations, and he hastened to seize it and banish it to the eaves of the roof, in such a way that its vapors no longer entered the attic.

Then his eyes rested upon the inert figure upon the mattress in the furthest corner, and a gleam of comprehension traversed his face.

"Poor creature!" was his involuntary exclamation, as his swift glance took in all the signs of horrible poverty the attic exhibited. "It's no wonder!"

Pauline lay there so silent and motionless that he naturally took her to be a corpse, as was only too natural after the experience he himself had had of the strength of the carbonic acid at the moment of his entrance.

"What a pity!" he added, as his eyes became so much accustomed to the gloom of the place that they could note the youth and beauty of the victim.

But might not the fresh air which had saved him from all harm have been equally beneficial to the fair unknown? Might he not be able to save her?

As the wild hope traversed his soul he knelt beside the unconscious girl, and leaned forward sufficiently to apply his ear to her heart.

What joy!

He could still distinguish the movements of that vital organ, as muffled and heavy as were its beats.

She lived!

There was still a chance to save her!

His first movement was to fly to the door, with the evident design of calling for assistance.

But he halted abruptly as he reached it.

"Impossible!" he muttered. "To do so would be to give myself up!"

He stood as if petrified.

"What shall I do?" was his hurried inquiry. "I can't let her die there, if there is still a chance for her. That would be abominable—almost a murder!"

A bitter smile curled his lips.

"And whatever the police may think," he added, "I am still a long ways from being an assassin!"

He returned to Pauline, kneeling beside her and raising her head, with the idea of making her more accessible to the fresh air which was

now penetrating to every corner of the apartment.

Ere long the girl made a movement, rather involuntary than conscious, but one which nevertheless attested that she was rapidly recovering from the effect of the poisonous vapors she had been breathing.

A few minutes more, and she aroused herself completely, turning upon the new-comer a wondering and inquiring glance, as he assisted her to her solitary chair.

"Who are you?" were the first words she addressed to him.

"Who am I?" was his response, as he knelt at her feet, taking her hand. "I am one of the vanquished—like yourself. My name is Harry Fountain. And you?"

"I am Pauline Munson."

In other terms, she was the innocent messenger of whom Dr. Wyville had made use in New York to convey a decoy letter to Percy Wyville, and he was the young man who had so sternly demanded of the doctor what had become of the fortune left by his mother.

They were strangely and fatefully met, as we shall see.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BLENDING OF MISERIES.

"How came you here?" resumed Pauline.

Young Fountain indicated the hole he had made in the window.

"What! broke in?"

"As you see, Pauline. And that is what has saved your life."

"Ah! you saw the stove through the window and comprehended—"

"Not at all. I was flying from the police, having just escaped their clutches."

The first sentiment of Pauline at this intelligence was almost a feeling of terror.

"What have you been doing?" she asked.

"Nothing wrong or unusual. But what *they* have been doing is to charge me with a murder about which I know only what I've read in the newspapers—the one which took place not long ago in Weebawken!"

These explanations were given with such candor, with such a look of frankness, that Pauline dismissed the uneasiness caused her by the fugitive's first declaration.

"How strange that you should be here!" she murmured, with a glance as full of sympathy as respect. "A fugitive from the police comes to the rescue of one anxious to take leave of the world! How shall I ever thank you? How my misery comes back to me as I realize that I haven't even a fire to warm you!"

Her eyes filled up suddenly with tears.

"And you have not only saved me, Mr. Fountain," she resumed, "but I feel as if I could take up the burden of life again and carry it awhile longer. Is it a kindness you have done me, or is a new season of torture to begin? In any case, I shall never cease to be grateful."

Harry Fountain inclined himself, with the air of one who refrains from speaking lest he should break some spell or enchantment resting upon him.

In good truth, he wondered where he had spent all his days that he had never before encountered such a sweet girl as had thus unexpectedly been thrust upon his notice.

"I—I suppose you must go," she continued, as she arose and crossed the floor with unsteady steps to the broken window.

"Will you drive me away?" he asked.

"Certainly not, but you see in what a plight I am," and she waved her hand over the barren scene the attic presented. "Besides—"

"Bad as the place is," he hastened to say, "it is better than a cell at a police-station. May I not remain here until night?"

"Most assuredly, if you can find heart to remain in such a wretched place without fire, without anything to eat or drink."

She looked almost happy at the thought of rendering him a service.

"I shall be very thankful," he said, as he joined her at the window. "With the aid of the coming darkness, I may be able to make my escape from the city. As wholly innocent as I am, I shrink from the fate menacing me—that of being shut up a long time and placed on trial for my life."

He seized her hand, pressing it to his lips, and she felt hiestars upon it.

"You weep!" she ejaculated.

"But not for myself, Pauline. It's only because I am so helpless and hunted—so powerless to come to your relief! Ah, this is an hour when I feel what a horrible thing it is to be penniless! How unfortunate that my poor mother and I have been robbed of all I possessed!"

"My poor friend," murmured Pauline, as she led him to her solitary chair, and seated herself at his feet. "I, too, am in the greatest distress, and have always been lonely and miserable. These things seem to make us a sort of brother and sister. Shall we consider ourselves such?"

"Oh, if you will be so good!"

"I was all alone here. No one cares for me. I haven't a friend in the world—no relative!"

"My case exactly."

"But now there are two of us!"

"You are an angel, Pauline. To have made your acquaintance seems the best and brightest experience of my life. I suppose I am already aware why you wished to die?"

"No doubt," and she again waved her hand over the desolate scene around her.

"The dire distress of poverty?"

"Yes, that's it."

"And nothing else, Pauline?" he pursued, with some hesitation.

"Nothing else, Harry."

A gleam of joy appeared in the eyes of Harry Fountain.

He was pleased to know that there was no love affair at the bottom of the girl's desperation.

"I have a few cents," he resumed, after a brief pause, "and is it not possible with these to procure a fire, or a morsel of bread?"

"Certainly."

"But I cannot go out—"

"Ah, that's true. But I can, Harry."

She gained her feet promptly, but had hardly taken a step toward the door when she tottered and fell, and would have doubtless received a severe injury if Harry Fountain had not extended his hands in time to save her.

"Oh, I'm so weak," she panted, and he placed her in the chair. "The room reels around me. I—I have not had anything to eat since yesterday morning, and I've long been on a starvation diet."

"My poor Pauline," murmured Harry. "You see that you are not able to go out. We shall have to wait for night!"

At that moment a slight sound was heard upon the roof.

It was caused by a man who had been looking in upon the couple several minutes at the broken window, and listening to every word they uttered.

He was now beating a retreat over the same route by which young Fountain had gained the attic.

"Ah! what's that?" breathed Pauline.

The couple held their breath, listening intently.

"It sounded like the creak of the roof under a footstep," added the girl.

Harry looked startled, becoming pale.

"Perhaps the police have tracked me over the roof," he whispered. "And if so—"

There was no need to finish the sentence.

In the case indicated, it was only too evident that Harry must promptly exchange that poor attic for a cell in a police-station.

"Oh, I hope not," breathed Pauline, trembling in every limb, as she clung to his arm. "I—I hear nothing more. Perhaps the sound we heard was caused by some cat."

Harry crossed the floor to the broken window and looked out cautiously, scanning the roof in every direction and as far as possible.

"I see nothing suspicious," he announced.

"Besides, I am perfectly certain that no one saw me when I ascended the staircase and passed through the scuttle to the roof. Let us hope for the best."

He returned to Pauline, seating himself at her feet, and the conversation was renewed, each going at some length into the details of their gradual descent into the abyss in which they now found themselves. Both had become oblivious of everything save this exchange of confidences, when heavy steps were heard on the landing, and there came a loud knock on the door.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE STYLE OF THE FAIRIES.

"Who can that be?" whispered Pauline, unable to form the least conjecture as to the identity of the visitor.

"I understand—only too well," returned Harry, as his face grew white. "They've come to arrest me!"

He ran to the window, looking out with a desperate eye, but he shrunk, as was natural, from an attempt to retrace his steps by the route which had served for his arrival.

The knock was repeated.

"There's no help, Pauline," he whispered hurriedly, as he glided back to her side. "I shall have to give myself up. If we do not unlock the door they'll break it open. Ask who is there!"

Pauline tottered in the direction of the entrance, Harry's hand sustaining her.

"Who's there?" she demanded.

"The glass man," was the answer.

"The glass man!" echoed the girl, in wild-eyed amazement.

"Yes. This is Miss Pauline's room, isn't it?" pursued the voice.

"Certainly! And what then?"

"Nothing, except that I have come to put in the pane of glass that was broken!"

The young couple exchanged glances, a prey to the liveliest stupefaction.

"It's simply a trick to get the door opened," then suggested Harry.

"I—I am ill," cried Pauline, tottering back to her chair, "and—"

"Oh, I shall soon be done," declared the voice outside the door. "The glass has been paid for, and I can do no less than put it in!"

"What to say to that?" gasped Pauline, as she turned an imploring glance upon Harry.

"He seems to be alone," said the latter, who had applied his ear and eye in turn to the key-hole. "Be calm. We shall have to open sooner or later, and as well now as an hour hence."

He unlocked the door and opened it with the abruptness of desperation, to find himself face to face with a glass man, who carried on his back his box of materials and instruments.

"Excuse me for disturbing you," he said, as he stepped into the attic. "But a broken pane, with this November chill in the air is a little too much for even a pair of lovers."

The astonishment of Pauline was so great that she didn't even think of blushing at the glass man's remark.

As to Harry, he remained on his guard, as watchful as amazed, and contrived to look for an explanation of the mystery.

"Who sent you?" asked Pauline, as the glass man set briskly to work.

"I don't know. A man I encountered near the house, who said: 'Go up to the sixth floor, first door to the right, and ask for Miss Pauline. There's a pane to put in, and here's your money! So, here I am!'"

He continued his work, while Pauline and Harry stared at him with the air of asking themselves if they were dreaming.

The job finished, the glass man shouldered his box, and turned toward the door.

"You'll find that better," he said. "Good-afternoon."

As he opened the door, he stepped aside to give admittance to a grocer's assistant, who had a sack of coal on his shoulders and a half-dozen bundles of kindling wood in his hand.

"Is this Miss Pauline's?" he demanded.

"Right you are, my man," replied the glass man, as he passed out, closing the door behind him, and leaving the grocer's assistant within the attic.

"Where shall I put this coal?" he asked, as he halted, balancing the sack on his shoulders.

"I haven't ordered any coal," returned Pauline. "There must be some mistake."

"Are you Miss Pauline?"

"Yes."

"And this is the sixth floor, the first door to the right?"

"It is."

"Then it's all right. Where shall I put it?"

"Who told you to come?"

"A strange gentleman, who has paid in advance."

Pauline remained dumb with amazement, with her eyes fixed upon young Fountain.

"Can you comprehend this?" she asked.

"I can only think that some one who is aware of your distress has ventured to take the liberty—"

"Take it away," enjoined Pauline, turning to the grocer's assistant. "I didn't order it. It's not for me. I don't want it!"

"Impossible, miss," was the reply, as the speaker deposited the sack and wood on the hearth. "It's all paid for."

And he hurriedly departed.

Left to themselves, the young couple were about to exchange their impressions, when there came another knock at the door.

Harry hastened to open.

This time it was a man from a furniture store, who brought a little square table, in black walnut, and a couple of cane-seated chairs.

"For Miss Pauline," he said, as he entered. "This is the place, I believe?"

"Certainly," replied Harry.

The man deposited the table and chairs in the middle of the room, and turned to depart.

"They're paid for, I suppose?" queried Harry.

"Yes, sir."

"By whom?" asked Pauline, paling and flushing by turns.

"By a stranger who did not give his name, but is doubtless known to madam—"

"Quite right," said Pauline, and the man vanished in the style of his predecessors.

As the door closed upon him, the nervous wonder of Pauline reached a crisis, and she burst into tears.

"Mr. Fountain," she said solemnly, as soon as she could control her voice, "I swear by everything sacred that I haven't the slightest idea who has sent these things here, nor what are his motives. I can only suppose there is some mistake."

"In any case we need not refuse to accept the gifts of our good fairy," said Harry, with a smile. "Let's start a fire! There's a grate the other side of that chimney board, doubtless?"

"Oh, yes."

The couple hastened to make use of their resources, and a cheerful fire was soon burning in the grate.

Seating herself before it, Pauline extended her hands toward the flame, with such an air of contentment that Harry felt his eyes filling with tears.

"But why don't you draw up your chair and sit down, Harry?" she asked, suddenly realizing that he was standing. "You must be as tired as I am, and you lose half the benefit of this fire in keeping so far away from it. Ah, how good it

seems, to be warm again! Let these supplies have come from whence they may, they are doubly welcome, since you are here to enjoy them."

Harry drew up a chair and sat down beside her. He was nearly as full of appreciation of the situation as herself.

"This is indeed an agreeable change," he said, as he held his hands toward the fire. "I hope you'll be warmed into life so thoroughly that you will never again attempt to harm yourself!"

"I have passed that point already, Harry. The world looks different to me since I came out of that deathlike sleep and saw you bending over me. Do you know what my first thought was? I took you to be an angel—I did indeed, Harry—there was such a kind good look upon your face!"

"I can only hope you won't find the reality too strong a contrast with your ideal," he returned gently. "You must have been very unhappy to become so desperate!"

"I was, Harry. I was so terribly alone. No one loved me, and I loved no one. But now—"

She blushed in sweet confusion, and then her face paled strangely, while she clasped her hand to her side.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"A—sudden pain," she faltered, becoming still paler. "But it will soon pass away."

"You are starving!" cried Harry.

"I certainly think that, with this new table and with such a good fire, the one thing we now lack is a dinner."

"If I dared, I would go out for a bite of something," said Harry. "I have a few cents, as I have already mentioned."

"Don't think of it!" returned Pauline, tremblingly. "I cannot let you go. There! I feel better. That pain will soon go away. As soon as I feel well enough, I will go and get some bread, or whatever your money will buy."

At this moment footsteps were heard on the landing, and there came another knock at the door.

"Again?" murmured Pauline, in a whisper, all her alarms returning. "Remain where you are, and let me see who is there."

As she opened the door, she found herself face to face with a waiter, in a white apron, who bore on his head an immense tray that was literally loaded with all sorts of smoking dishes.

"Is this Miss Pauline's?" he asked.

The girl bowed in speechless bewilderment.

"I have brought the dinner," pursued the waiter, stepping into the apartment and depositing his tray upon the stand. "And as I came only half a dozen doors, I'll warrant it is as hot as you can eat it."

He spread a cloth upon the new table, and proceeded to serve the dinner, with that rapidity of touch which can only be acquired by long practice.

"I'll return for the things, miss, about five o'clock," he then said, with a respectful bow; and with this he took his departure.

"Very strange, is it not?" exclaimed Harry, as soon as the waiter's steps had died out of their hearing.

"So strange and inexplicable," returned Pauline, snuffing eagerly the savory odors arising from the table, "that I'm afraid it will all turn out to be a dream! But it's such a nice one, that it would be a pity to awake, wouldn't it?"

"We might call it a dream, perhaps," said Harry smilingly, "if there were only two covers, but there are three!"

"Sure enough!"

"It's evident, therefore," pursued Harry, between joy and pain, "that some one knows I am here, and that there is a third guest who will join us!"

"Let him come quick, then!" cried Pauline, almost gayly, "or I'm afraid his share of the dinner will be found wanting."

"All right, my friends!" cried a cheery voice from the door, which the waiter had purposely left ajar an inch or two. "Take your places."

The young couple faced about quickly, with the keenest interest.

A middle-aged man, of pleasant aspect, stood in the doorway, smiling and bowing, with a bottle of wine under his arm, and a basket of the choicest fruits of the season in his hand.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STRANGER'S BUSINESS.

THAT neither Pauline nor Harry had ever seen the stranger before, was perfectly apparent, not merely from the glances they exchanged, but from those they bestowed upon him.

Without taking any notice of the surprise caused by his presence, the new-comer advanced into the room, placing his bottle on the table and his basket of fruit on the mantle-piece.

Then he carefully closed the door with the remark:

"There! we shall not be further troubled!"

He returned to Harry and Pauline, offering each a cordial grasp of the hand, as he resumed:

"I dare say you would both like a few words of explanation."

"In good truth, sir," returned Pauline, "you find us somewhat at a loss to decide whether we

are awake or dreaming. It is to you, then, that we are indebted—"

"Of course it is," avowed the new-comer, with a smile as hearty and cordial as his grasp. "But it is needless to say that I have not taken these liberties without reserving to myself the right to make you the fullest explanations."

"I need not say how impatient I am to hear them," said Pauline. "However grateful I am for your kindness, I cannot recall your features. I fear I have never so much as seen you."

"No more than I had seen you, up to a few hours ago."

"A few hours?" repeated the girl, wondering more and more at the problem presented to her. "Tell us who you are, sir, that I may at least know who I am indebted to for these kindnesses."

"I am Joseph Decker, at your service, Miss Pauline, as also at the service of Mr. Harry Fountain."

"You know my name!" cried Harry, with the accent of a man who feels that he is lost.

"Your name, sir, is as familiar to me as your person, do not doubt it," assured Mr. Joseph Decker, smilingly. "But that fact need not worry you. I am your sincere friend, and one from whom you have nothing to fear."

"That begins to be apparent, Mr. Decker," said Harry, in a voice which showed his appreciation of the visitor's assurances; "but no one can take such action as you have done without well-defined motives, and we shall be glad, therefore, to be enlightened—"

"Naturally enough," recognized Decker, "but we can best deal with these matters upon a full stomach. Miss Pauline, as is easy to see, is pale and trembling for the want of something to eat. You, also, Mr. Fountain, cannot have fared very sumptuously during the last few hours," and here he smiled significantly, while Harry started as violently as if his hand had encountered a flame. "As to myself, I have been too busy today to take my dinner at the usual hour, and I must confess that my stomach has put in a claim for a subsidy. Let's take our places, therefore, and do justice to the good things at our disposal, while we proceed to get more particularly acquainted."

"The motion is seconded and carried, *nem. con.*" declared Harry, with an air of relief, as he offered his arm to Pauline and conducted her to the post of honor, which also gave her the advantage of having her back to the fire. "Let's eat and talk in well-mixed doses, so that mind and body will find solid benefit in the proceeding."

"Well said, my dear Mr. Fountain," commented Decker, as he and Harry proceeded to take their places. "Now to take action."

Little more was said until the first demands of their hunger had been appeased by the trio, and all had taken a few swallows of the generous wine Decker had so thoughtfully provided.

"We'll now begin to talk, my friends," then said Joseph Decker, as he looked from one to the other, "and in order to put you both at your ease I'll take it upon myself to set the example."

The attention of Harry and Pauline to everything said by this singular personage had been intense from the moment of his appearance, and this attention now redoubled.

"Of course," he resumed, "I am not ignorant of your impatience and curiosity, which are perfectly legitimate."

He paused long enough to fill up the glasses again, and then added:

"Mr. Fountain especially is entitled to my candor, on account of his very peculiar and threatening situation."

Harry moved uneasily, becoming first red, and then very pale.

"Having mentioned my name," continued Decker, "I may as well add that I am a tenant in the fine, four-story mansion of Doctor Wyville—"

He was interrupted by an ejaculation from Harry, but quietly continued:

"Yes, my friends, I have rented a particularly nice suite of rooms immediately over those occupied by that illustrious physician. My object in taking up my abode in such close proximity to this distinguished gentleman was to cast an inquiring eye upon his affairs, and I am happy to say that the result responds to my fondest anticipations. What I have learned about his life, habits, and relations, is really surprising."

Pauline listened to these observations attentively, but without any very marked interest, as her curiosity was centered almost exclusively upon the events preceding the dinner.

Not so Harry, however.

From the first mention of the name of Doctor Wyville, he had listened with all the force of sight and hearing.

It was not until Pauline noticed how fascinated Harry seemed to be that she fixed her every thought upon the thread of Decker's revelation.

"Having given these details," proceeded Decker, "which tell you who I am and where I live, it only remains for me to tell you what I do. Every man on earth has his special business, or ought to have. Mine is to discover and call to account the assassin of Hubert Garson!"

At the mention of that name, Harry Foun-

tain arose, deathly pale, and regarded the man opposite him with a countenance in which was displayed a strange mixture of wrath, despair, terror and disgust.

"Mr. Decker," he said, as a cold perspiration beaded his forehead, while his eyes flamed defiantly, "if you are here to arrest me, what is the use of all this comedy?"

Joseph Decker continued his repast as conscientiously as if this earnest query had failed to reach his hearing.

"Arrest you?" cried Pauline, almost wild with terror. "What for?"

"Because I am accused of the murder of that unfortunate!"

"You, Harry? Impossible!"

She arose at a bound, placing herself between Harry and Decker, covering him, so to speak, with her own body, in a generous impulse of faith, devotion, and gratitude, while she added:

"Such an accusation is as absurd as contemptible. No one can believe it!"

"Ah, you do not, that's clear," exclaimed Harry. "A thousand thanks!"

He raised her hand and pressed it to his lips with a fervor which attested how much he prized her good opinion.

Joseph Decker looked smilingly at them, with a calm and satisfied air, and at the same time remarked:

"Nothing is more certain, however—"

"It's false," interrupted Pauline. "The man who has saved me cannot possibly be an assassin or any lesser criminal!"

"—than that such an accusation has been seriously and extensively made," finished Decker, as he raised his glass to wash down a piece of bread which had nearly lodged in his throat. "But I am not one of those who have taken that view of the matter!"

"Ah!" sighed the young couple, in chorus.

"And I am so little inclined to that view of the case," added Decker, "that I have constantly affirmed to the contrary!"

"Ah!" breathed Harry again, with a heavier sigh of relief than before. "Such being the case—"

"I must ask Miss Pauline to resume her place at the table, as she evidently will not have any occasion to protect you from me, Mr. Fountain," interrupted Decker, with an air of raillery which attested how much he enjoyed the situation. "Sit down, my dear child, and we'll resume progress."

If there was something quaint and pleasant about this singular man, there was also something authoritative, and Pauline hastened to resume her seat.

"If I had desired to arrest you, Mr. Fountain," then continued Decker, "you may be sure that the step would have been taken long ago. If I had even wished to hand you over to those who are so actively looking for you, I could have spoken to the nearest policeman and brought him here with me. Don't you realize that fact?"

"I certainly do, sir," acknowledged Harry. "Pardon me for that suspicion, which I fear was only too natural, in the horrible situation in which I am placed."

"You see, then, that I am not here to arrest you, and also that I am not in the least inclined to put the police on your track. To the contrary, I am here to save you, and at the same time to get all the aid I can from you toward the discovery of the real assassin!"

CHAPTER XXII.

HARRY'S RELATIONS TO DR. WYVILLE.

AT these candid declarations of Decker, Harry and Pauline drew a long breath of relief.

Harry especially could not help flushing with delight.

"I am glad you recognize my innocence, Mr. Decker," he hastened to declare. "I have never known that unfortunate Hubert Garson who was found dead at the foot of the cliff in Weehawken, and it is more than probable that I have never so much as seen him. The first I knew about him was what I read in the papers. I am the victim of some dreadful error."

"Say rather of some fiendish conspiracy," amended Decker.

"Oh, sir," implored Harry, "if you know anything about this frightful affair, I beg you to tell me all you know."

"I know only one thing with absolute certainty," assured Decker, "and that is that you are not the assassin, but I have no doubt you can aid me to find him!"

"And how, if you please? Speak!"

"In the first place, I want you to give me all the information in your power, without keeping anything from me."

"That I am ready to do sir."

"When you were in New York the last time, where did you put up?"

"At the Union Square Hotel."

"Had you ever been there before?"

"Never."

"How came you to go there?"

"Simply because of its central situation."

"Did you strike up any acquaintance with any of the guests who were stopping there at the same time as yourself?"

"Not the slightest. It would have been im-

possible for me to do so, as I was there for only twenty-four hours, and did not take a single meal at the hotel."

"You wrote from there to your mother's lawyer, Mr. Denman, of Philadelphia, to tell him that you would soon call upon him?"

"Ah! you're aware of that fact?" cried Harry in surprise, although nothing ought to have surprised him by this time concerning Mr. Decker.

"And many other things yet to come," acknowledged the questioner. "It seems, then, that you were absolutely ignorant of the fact that Hubert Garson and Percy Wyville were stopping at Union Square at the same moment as yourself?"

At the mention of the name of Percy Wyville, Pauline Munson started as if electrified, and suddenly grew pale.

"Ah, what ails you?" asked Joseph Decker, turning toward her.

Pauline became red as promptly as she had turned white, and seemed very troubled and embarrassed.

"Is—is Percy Wyville in any way involved in the murder of which you have been speaking?" she asked.

"Oh, not much. But I see that his name is familiar to you," said Decker, surprised in his turn.

"To me? I think not—that is—"

She paused in confusion.

"Never mind all that now," said Decker indulgently. "We'll come back to the subject later."

A far-off look came into his eyes.

"This is singular," was his thought.

"We mustn't mix our dishes," he resumed aloud. "You'll tell us what you know about Percy Wyville when I have done with Mr. Fountain."

His singular little eyes gleamed like a pair of carbuncles at the prospect.

"To come back to our inquiry," he pursued, turning to Harry. "You were wholly ignorant, then, that Hubert Garson and Percy Wyville were guests at the Union Square Hotel during your stay there?"

"Absolutely, sir. How could I have known anything about them? I was not even aware of their existence."

"You didn't meet them there?"

"No, sir. That would have been difficult, seeing that I only came back to the hotel to sleep, after passing the whole day outside."

"You declared to the clerk on arriving at the hotel that you did not expect to remain in New York more than a few hours?"

"I did. But a registered letter from the interior was delayed, and caused me to remain longer than first intended."

"All this has been established," muttered Joseph Decker inaudibly.

Then, raising his voice:

"What did you do during that day of delay?"

"I took a look at a good share of New York, as also of Brooklyn, Jersey City, and the other suburbs."

"Including Weehawken?"

"Yes, sir—including Weehawken."

"How came you to go to the latter place?"

"Simply to see the beginning of those immense cliffs which line the west shore of the Hudson in that quarter."

"You spoke to a young lad on the cliffs who was caring for some sheep?"

"To be sure!" admitted Harry, with another glance of astonishment at the man opposite him, who had continued to munch his dinner as quietly as if he had no preoccupations outside of that proceeding.

"All this has been verified, Mr. Fountain," declared Decker. "All your goings and comings on that fatal day, including your presence in Weehawken—all these steps of yours have been duly investigated, in their every detail and relation, during the two months that you have been under constant observation, as the presumed or possible author of that terrible crime."

"What crime?" cried Pauline, deeply agitated, as she drew back her chair from the table. "Is it Percy Wyville who has been assassinated?"

"No, my child, but another man," replied Decker, regarding the girl with a surprise which had suddenly received an immense development.

"Then so much the better," commented Pauline, with an air of relief.

"Thunder!" breathed Decker, in a whisper too low to reach the ears of his companions.

It appeared later that this was a comment of which he made use only when very much puzzled and interested.

"It seems that I am likely to get here more than I came for," he said, raising his voice, as he looked from one to the other.

"From all this," said Harry, bitterly, "it seems that I have been watched and followed ever since the day of that awful tragedy."

"Naturally enough, sir. Why did you go to those cliffs where the crime was committed, and where so few go, unless you desired to take a preliminary view of the spot destined to be the

scene of the bloody deed? Don't you see how natural it was for suspicion to light upon you?"

"I do, indeed. But I visited Weehawken on that day merely by chance. I was preoccupied with what Mr. Denman had written me, namely, the death of my mother, and the total disappearance of her fortune—such as it was."

"And when you left New York you were not aware that Hubert Garson had been murdered?"

"No, sir. I only learned the fact later in Philadelphia from the newspapers. I left New York by one of the first trains in the morning."

"In the same train, in fact, that was taken by Percy Wyville, the nephew of the doctor, who has since become the husband of the daughter, Miss Nora."

A brief silence succeeded.

"And you were in nowise dispirited when you read in the papers the details of the murder?" resumed Decker.

"No more than you would be if you were to read to-day of the murder of a man in Baltimore of whom you had never before heard, and had never even seen. How could I foresee that I would be suspected and accused of a crime with which I had no connection whatever, either by word or by deed?"

"Ah, these innocents, who think it is enough to be innocent!" ejaculated Joseph Decker, with a laugh. "They're always the same!"

"Besides," added Harry, "I was so cruelly preoccupied with my own affairs at that moment that it would have been simply impossible for me to give a thought to the affairs of others. The crime in question made no more impression upon me than hundreds of others of a similar nature which have filled the newspapers before that day and since."

"You were greatly in need of money at that time, I believe?"

"Worse than that, Mr. Decker. I had exhausted all my resources, and was living in a state of actual distress—as I am at this moment, in fact, since the situation has been getting worse and worse every day since my return to Philadelphia."

"Now tell me all you have done since your return to this city," requested the visitor, as he also drew his chair away from the table, "and especially all that has passed between you and the illustrious Doctor Wyville!"

"As soon as I arrived, and without writing to even find a room or take my valise from the station, I hurried to Mr. Denman."

"He has long been the legal representative of your family. I believe?"

"Yes, sir, and also a friend of my brother. They had been together at college. Their relations were not actually intimate, since they occupied different spheres and were differently employed, but they had never lost sight of each other, and were united by a sincere esteem."

"I am aware of that. Continue."

"Of course Mr. Denman received me with all due regard and respect," pursued Harry, "but it did not take him long to tell me that my mother had died as near to beggary as possible. Even her jewels and every article of art or ornamentation in the house had been converted into money, and the money had vanished."

"With or without your mother's knowledge?"

"Oh, with it. But she acted under the advice of her physician, who was no less a notability than Doctor Wyville."

"Yes, I am aware of it. But you don't believe your mother intended to get rid of all you had and leave you penniless?"

"Certainly not. She and I are victims of Doctor Wyville's greed and cunning!"

"How do you know that?"

"Well, a few days before her death, my mother had an attack which came very near ending her days. She was alone at that moment, having no servant. An old lady of the vicinity happening to pass her door heard her groans and came to her assistance, giving her every possible attention, while a messenger was dispatched for the doctor. When my mother returned to her senses, the old lady in question told her that she ought not to live in such an isolated fashion, but that she ought to have a servant, and especially that she ought to send for her son."

"And what response did your mother make to this suggestion?"

"She said that she was acting in my interest by keeping me away from her, and that she had taken all necessary measures to assure to me every dollar she might leave behind her, having a friend who had taken charge of her finances."

"Ah! Doctor Wyville?"

"Exactly. All these points having been given me by Mr. Denman and others, I hastened to pay Dr. Wyville a visit. I accused him of appropriating to his use all my mother's possessions."

"And quite right you was," commented Decker.

"Ah, you accuse him too?"

"And not merely you and I, but the circumstances and facts of the situation. Doctor Wyville was the only one who visited the sick lady, the only one who had her confidence. She died

under his care. An empty house was all she left behind her. But what did the doctor say to your accusations?"

"He denied everything point-blank. He even claimed that he had never received a cent for either medicine or attendance. He finally said he would give me such details of my mother's last days as he possessed, only it was then his hour of consultation, and he asked me to call another day. This first visit took place the very day he was expecting his nephew, Percy Wyville."

"Yes, I am aware of that. But you got no satisfaction from the doctor?"

"Not the least. He pretended not to know why my mother had withdrawn her money from the hands of Mr. Denman, or why she had sold her bonds and mortgages, or why she had converted everything valuable into money. As to the charge that my mother had deposited all she possessed with him, in trust for me, he laughed it to scorn, and defied me to bring the least proof of any such theory."

"The doctor is wise in his way," observed Joseph Decker, with smiling significance. "But you paid him a second visit?"

"Yes, sir—two days ago!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE THOUSAND DOLLAR GREENBACK.

JOSEPH DECKER leaned back in his chair with the air of a man who sees his affairs taking the very turn he has long and ardently desired.

"Give me the details of that second visit, Mr. Fountain," he enjoined, "and take good care not to make any mistake, or to leave any important fact of the last two days unmentioned."

His attention redoubled as Harry resumed:

"On the occasion of that second visit, I arrived at the doctor's house in a state of veritable exasperation. All I had previously said having produced no result, I was resolved to get at the matter in another way, the more especially as I had reached the lowest abyss of want. No sooner had I met him, therefore, than I said:

"I have made a thorough investigation of my mother's last days, as you so sneeringly recommended that I should, and I am in possession of ample proofs of what I have hitherto asserted."

"I thereupon proceeded to relate, step by step, the investigations I had made, and which showed beyond all question that he was the 'friend' to whom my mother had confided, in trust for me, every dollar she possessed in the world. He listened with an air of bravado, and with an ironical smile which almost maddened me."

"Your intention, then," he said, "is to charge me with abuse of confidence, with robbery, and with fraudulently taking advantage of a weak-minded woman to rob you of your heritage?"

"Yes, that is what I mean to say," I replied.

"And the facts prove every word I have uttered."

"I comprehend your little game," he said, as calmly as ever. "Having always been an idle, and bad son, you now design to blackmail me. It is not enough that I have treated your mother all these years without pay, and that your vile treatment of her has shortened her days. As to any money which may be missing, I have no doubt you are the one who has got away with it!"

"What you say is a falsehood," I declared, hotly. "It has been years since I had a dollar from my mother!"

"I was so angry at that moment that I could hardly keep my hands from violence. But the more I lost my self-control, the more did he seem to acquire a complete mastery over his emotions."

"You'll have a good chance," he threatened, "to prove that what I say is false."

"Very well," was my answer, "I can prove it!"

"And with this I proceeded to tell him what my mother said to the old lady who had come to her assistance on the occasion of her sudden illness, as I have stated."

"You did?" cried Decker. "Then I must say that you did very wrong. Your imprudence may have already cost that poor old lady her life, if she has had any occasion to call in the services of Doctor Wyville. But continue. We will see about all that later."

"Nevertheless, he became as pale as a ghost on hearing that statement," proceeded Harry, "and his glance grew so murderous that I was glad to see people passing within call. Getting angry in his turn, he told me that my mother had long been foolish and had not known for years what she was about. He even had the insolence to tell me that I had hired the old lady to give false testimony in the sense indicated."

"How can I have hired her? I demanded."

"I haven't a dollar in the world!"

"If you have no money," he responded, "you have promised to give her a share of what you can get out of me!"

"We'll see about that," I declared, "for I am going now to make complaint and commence a suit against you."

"The words stung him keenly."

"With what?" he asked. "You say you are penniless, and a suit cannot be commenced without money!"

"I'll interest a lawyer in the matter by

promising him a share of the gains. Since you have given me that idea, I'll take good care to use it. If necessary, I'll even make over to him every dollar I win. I'd sooner die of hunger than fail to unmask you!"

"And with this I took my way toward the door."

"Where are you going?" he asked, in a half-suffocated voice.

"To make my complaint."

"Better not!"

"But I will. I've nothing to lose."

"There's where you are mistaken. And you'll not be long in learning the fact!"

"There was something so terrible in his voice, as he uttered this menace, that, despite all my coolness, I could not help shuddering. His appearance was simply frightful. His eyes gleamed like fire. His thin lips, drawn up by a violent contraction, left his teeth visible. He looked as if bile were issuing from every pore. Ah, any one seeing him at that moment would have believed him capable of any crime."

"I see," I could not help remarking, "that it's a war to the death between us!"

"Yes, a war to the death!" he returned, grinding his teeth savagely.

"So be it! I'll not fail to be as disagreeable as I can!"

"And with this I left him!"

"And you have not seen him since, I suppose?" asked Decker.

"No, sir."

"And when did this last visit take place?"

"Night before last."

"Very well. What did you do after leaving him?"

"I was beside myself with indignation and excitement, and felt the necessity of physical activity. The evening was cool, and I gradually recovered my self-control as I walked through the streets almost at random. The calmer I got, the more difficulties I saw in the way of executing my threats. I realized that Mr. Denman would not be likely to take action for me in a matter so full of scandal and obscurity. But for all that I could not accept the situation. Doctor Wyville had made for me. Every word of that man, like his every action, was a confession of his guilt. How could I get hold of him?"

"Revolving these things in my mind, I continued to wander on and on. How hungry I was! Gradually the cold took hold of me. But I shrunk from returning to my lodgings and asking for my key, for I was afraid of being dunned anew for what I owed. At last, not far from midnight, shivering with the cold, and with a stomach crying for food, I ventured to return home. A servant gave me admittance, as usual. As she handed me my key and a candle, she said:

"Here's a letter for you!"

"I took it from her hand. It bore my name only, in an unknown handwriting. It had not come through the mails."

"Who brought that letter here?" I asked the servant.

"A stranger, whose face I could not see in the darkness, and who vanished before I could bring a light."

"Where could the letter have come from? Who could have written it? What was it about? Full of inquiries of this nature, I hastened to my room. Locking the door, I proceeded to open the envelope and the half-sheet of note-paper it contained, when out fell a thousand-dollar greenback!"

"And this is the way in which that greenback came into your possession, is it?" cried Joseph Decker vehemently, forsaking for the first time the placidity which had characterized him throughout the interview. "How strange! how very singular!"

As he uttered these comments, he sprang up abruptly, with an excitement he could not control, and which was all the more striking by reason of the contrast it offered to his previous conduct.

"Yes, sir," assured Harry, "that is the way in which that thousand-dollar greenback came into my possession."

"I believe you, Mr. Fountain," declared Decker, after he had stared wonderingly into the face of the young man for a few minutes, "but I regret to add that nobody else will, so incredible is your story, so absurd even!"

Pauline and Harry regarded their new-acquaintance with a sort of stupefaction, so much did his last remark seem to be in contradiction with his declaration that he believed Harry's explanation of the manner in which the greenback had come into his hands.

"It must have seemed very strange to receive a greenback of that denomination, and not know where it came from," resumed Decker. "I dare say you couldn't even imagine at that moment who had sent it to you?"

"No more than I can now, sir! Up to this moment I am as much in the dark as ever!"

"Indeed!"

Very singular was the tone in which Joseph Decker made this comment.

"Ah! you know something on that point?" cried Harry.

"It remains to be seen whether I do or not," avowed Decker. "To know how the letter

came into your hands, it would be necessary, it seems to me, to find the messenger who brought it to your lodging. But go on."

Harry accordingly resumed.

"I need not dwell upon my stupor at sight of that greenback; I couldn't believe my eyes. I felt of it, and spread it between my hands, and turned it over and over, holding it near the light, and for a time was too excited to ask who could have sent it. I scanned the envelope nervously, feeling that there might be some mistake in the address, but there was my name, no more and no less, and as legible as print."

"In what sort of writing?" asked the visitor.

"A large back-hand, which seemed to indicate haste and nervousness, for it was both blotted and trembling."

"Evidently a disguised hand?"

"It was, sir. In the desperate straits I had reached, I did not hesitate a moment about using this money. If there was any mistake, I thought, it could be rectified later. I slept little that night, as you can readily believe. It was not till toward morning that my long fatigues and my exhaustion of weeks overcame me. It was late when I awoke. My first act on awakening was to look at my precious greenback. There it was, sure enough! I hadn't been the sport of a dream, as I half-feared. Arising and dressing myself as promptly as possible, I took my way down-stairs, with the intention of hastening to some bank or broker's to change the greenback into smaller money. As I reached the ground floor, my nostrils were assailed by a delightful odor of the dinner the house was in the habit of serving, although I had always been too poor to avail myself of it. I was too near starved to go a step further. I advanced to my old landlady, showing her the greenback, and said:

"I have received money, madam, and am now ready to settle. I'll take dinner here and pay afterward, but I must first change this thousand-dollar greenback."

"She became as smiling and gracious as you please on the instant."

"Mr. Cook is just going out," she said, "and will change the bill while you are at dinner."

"I was so hungry and tired at that moment that I accepted the proposition, giving her the bill and proceeding to get my dinner. Mr. Cook not having returned when I had finished, I went up to my room and ordered a fire. It was nice and cosy when I had got it well started, and I seated myself before it to enjoy it. Here I fell asleep, and slept until Mr. Cook brought me my money, with his receipted bill for all my indebtedness. How happy I was, with this change in my fortunes! I must have looked at my money and counted it scores of times. I remained in all the afternoon. Toward dark, I was preparing to go out, when I heard heavy steps ascending the staircase until they halted at my door, and then came a loud knock. I opened the door, and three men pushed their way into the room."

"They were the broker who had changed our greenback and two policemen," said Joseph Decker, quietly.

"Yes, they were," avowed Harry, "and they had come there to arrest me."

"To arrest you?" cried Pauline, bounding to her feet. "Upon what charge?"

"Upon the charge of murdering that unfortunate Hubert Garson, whose body was found at the foot of a cliff in Weehawken, all these weeks ago!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON TRACK OF DR. WYVILLE.

"BUT what a piece of absurdity and folly," protested Pauline, excitedly. "How stupid! You an assassin, Mr. Fountain? It's not true!"

"No, it's not true," confirmed Joseph Decker. "You are quite right about that, my child. But the accusation is neither absurd nor stupid. I do not remember to have seen an accusation better established, or based upon more irrefutable indications and proofs."

"Gracious Heaven!" cried Pauline. "What is it that you are saying?"

"Merely what any one will say who has looked into the matter," declared Joseph Decker, quietly. "Just follow me a moment, my dear child, and see where I'll lead you. To begin with, Mr. Fountain was at the same hotel in New York as Percy Wyville and Hubert Garson at the time of the tragedy. Secondly, the very day of the crime, and a few hours before its perpetration, he takes a stroll on the cliffs of Weehawken, at the very spot destined to be the scene of the crime, although no business of any kind called him there, and very few, indeed, are those who have ever been there. Thirdly, he was not only seen there, but he spoke to a boy, asking his way, and this lad has furnished a good description of him. In the fourth place, instead of coming on to Philadelphia, as he had announced the intention of doing, Mr. Fountain remains over night at the hotel, and comes on in the morning. Fifthly, it is well established that Percy Wyville had a thousand-dollar greenback when he put up at the Union Square, for he gave it to the clerk for safe-

keeping and the latter put it into the safe, after writing its number on the corner of the envelope which contained it. Later in the day, Percy Wyville asked for his greenback, saying that he must break it, as he had arranged to lend Mr. Garson some money. Sixthly, we learn from Percy Wyville, who has been duly interrogated, that he gave the said thousand-dollar greenback to Hubert Garson. Seventhly, the said greenback was not found upon Garson's body. And, finally, the greenback in question is the very one changed by Mr. Fountain yesterday!"

At this demonstration, which so unmistakably connected Harry with the murder, Pauline became as white as a sheet.

"Of course Mr. Fountain is innocent," she again protested. "There can be no doubt of that, Mr. Decker."

"Not the least, my dear," admitted the visitor, "but you see how essential it is that we arrive at the truth in this matter, since the truth alone is capable of removing the suspicions which now rest, legitimately enough, upon Mr. Fountain. Of course," he turned to Harry, "you did not fail to declare, at the moment of your arrest, just how the greenback came into your possession?"

"I told my story, sir, but no one gave the least credence to it. The sergeant of police merely shrugged his shoulders when I told him that some party unknown had left the money with the servant of the hotel, and he didn't even take the trouble to shrug his shoulders when I told him that I hadn't the slightest idea from whom the money had come!"

"But since you were innocent," insisted Pauline, "it does seem—"

"When you are innocent," interrupted Joseph Decker, "you are none the less condemned, unless you can prove your innocence, and Mr. Fountain is unable to prove it!"

"How horrible!" commented Pauline.

"Yes, so horrible that I could not help being prostrated with despair at learning the nature of the charge against me," continued Harry, almost wild with the recollections crowding upon him. "While a useless search was being made in my room, I comprehended from what was said by the broker and policemen that I was lost! I realized that the man who had sent me the greenback was the only one who could clear me, but there was not the least probability of any such action on his part in view of the infamous design of the bill. It was even probable, if not certain, that the man who sent me the bill was the assassin, or that he had sent it to me with the express intention of bringing about my condemnation."

"And still you don't even suspect who sent it to you?" asked Decker.

"No, sir!"

"Well, you are an innocent! But go on."

"Realizing more or less clearly the awful box I was in," pursued Harry, "I resolved to make my escape if the least chance was afforded me to that end. This step would be taken as a confession of guilt, but what did it matter? If I could retain my liberty I would be able to take some measures for the discovery of the truth, and it even seemed probable that I would be able to make my innocence as plain as the day in due course!"

"Which was not bad reasoning, after all," commented Decker, with approving nods.

"And you were able to make your escape?" asked Pauline, almost as excited as the narrator.

"By a miracle—yes," replied Fountain.

"Oh, tell me how it happened!"

"At the moment when the two policemen were marching me off, we were met on the stairs, which had not yet been lighted, by an individual who was hastily taking his way up, and who rushed into us all with such force that we caught a tumble. One of the policemen had a lantern, but it was extinguished by the fall. The policemen did not mean to release me, of course, but their first impulse was, naturally enough, to save themselves, and it did not cost me much of an effort to tear myself clear of their grasp. At the same instant a key was thrust into my hand, and a voice whispered in my ear—"

"Go! take the first turn to the right, and let yourself into number twenty-six," interrupted Decker, quietly.

"What! You know what I alone could have heard?" cried Harry, in indescribable amazement, as he turned a wondering gaze upon his visitor.

"Why not, seeing that I am the man who whispered those words in your ear?" returned Decker, with a smile.

"Ah, you are the man, then—"

"Yes, I am the man who gave you and the policemen your grand tumble on the staircase."

This surprising revelation caused the young couple a sort of stupor, as they stared at Decker, who seemed poorly equipped physically for such an act of audacity and strength as had resulted in Harry's strange delivery from the police.

But this stupefaction was of short continuance.

"What! that man was you!" cried Harry, as he sprang to his feet and grasped the hand of his deliverer and shook it with an energy

amounting to violence. "Ah, Mr. Decker! how can I ever thank you? How can I prove my eternal gratitude?"

"You are an angel, Mr. Decker!" suddenly cried Pauline, as she threw her arms about the neck of the visitor, and kissed him upon both cheeks rapidly, as she would have done by the best of fathers.

"What better recompense could I have than that?" returned Decker in a voice that vibrated for the first time with feeling and emotion. "For once in my life I am treated as an angel, in the style of a pretty woman, although it's certain that I am about as far from being a creature of that complexion as it is possible for any one to be. You are an excellent young pair, and I am delighted to have made your acquaintance. But let us not get excited. Be calm! be calm!"

It was easy to see that he needed to practice what he preached, for he pressed his hand swiftly across his eyes and there was a moisture in them which attested that he still carried a heart under his waistcoat.

"You see from all this, both of you," he resumed hastily, "that you can have the fullest confidence in me, inasmuch as I shouldn't have delivered Mr. Fountain from those two policemen, if I had had the least intention of being cruel to him later."

"That's as plain as the sun in the heavens!" assented Harry. "But we now want to know, my friend—allow me to give you this name—the motives of your conduct. To what end did you effect my deliverance?"

"Have I not avowed it already?" returned Decker. "I have long been looking for the murderer of Hubert Garson, and what I have done has been done in the interest of justice rather than because I had any desire to show you a personal kindness. I not only wanted to save a man I knew to be innocent, but I wanted you to assist me in discovering the man who committed that murder. Now that I have made your acquaintance, and listened to your confidences and explored your souls during this long interview, and have formed a good idea of what you are, besides conceiving a positive respect and affection for you, I am free to say that you shall soon be informed of my motives, and of the circumstances which have brought us together."

"All this is as much as to say that you are still keeping something from us," remarked Pauline, half-reproachfully.

"I will not deny it, my child, but that little defect in our relations can be remedied before I take my departure. For the moment, Mr. Fountain," he turned again to Harry, "I want to know why you didn't turn into number twenty-six, as I ordered?"

"I missed the number, in the darkness, and tried to get into the wrong house, thus delaying myself until I heard a hubbub behind me which I took to be an indication of the approach of the policemen, and thereupon I lost my head. To get away from the spot seemed to be the one necessity of the situation, and I was at least a mile away from the scene of my arrest before I could control my legs sufficiently to prevent them from running!"

Mr. Decker smiled at the quaint exposition of Harry's terror.

"And you have been on the dodge ever since, I suppose?" he queried.

"I have, sir. I passed the night in a sewer-pipe which lay in readiness to be placed this morning, but I left it with the first dawn of day, knowing that to be found in such a bed would give a bad idea of me. I will not pause to relate all the 'dodges' I have resorted to during the day to keep myself from falling into the hands of the police. It is enough to say that the last and worst of my perils was the one which caused me to take refuge in this tenement."

"Nevertheless, I was with the policemen from whom you last fled," said Decker, "and it is needless to say that you would have been 'run in' long ago, if I had not ordered to the contrary!"

This remark was so significant that even a fool could not have remained ignorant of its bearing.

"Ah!" gasped Harry, staring at him, with a sort of terror. "You—you are standing between me and the police?"

"Why not?" smiled Decker, "when it was I who took the liberty of releasing you from their clutches?"

"But why?"

"Because I wanted to question you about that greenback—and for other reasons. Do you still declare your entire ignorance as to the source from which that money came to you?"

"I do, sir."

"But what had you been doing at the moment when you received it?"

"What had I been doing?"

"Yes. What had been your last act so to speak, before it reached your hands?"

"Why, I—that is—why, I had just been to see Dr. Wyville!"

"To whom you had made apparent your desperation?"

Decker nodded.

"And whom you had threatened with a legal summons and complaint?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And who had looked at you as if he could tear your heart out?"

Again Harry bowed.

"And on your return from that interview you find that a thousand-dollar greenback has been left at your address for you by some one unknown?"

"It is only too true, sir!"

"And in making use of that greenback you get arrested, and so it becomes out of your power to make your little complaint against Dr. Wyville, or even to ask him again for the money he has stolen from you!"

"What! you accuse Dr. Wyville of being the man who sent me that greenback?" cried Harry wildly.

Mr. Decker nodded, in his usual quiet fashion.

"I am perfectly convinced of it," affirmed Pauline, pale with excitement.

"But, in that case, the doctor would have to be the assassin of Hubert Garson!" pursued Harry, more and more startled.

"Or to have some point of contact with him—yes, it's quite true!" avowed Decker. "In other terms, everything goes to show that the illustrious Dr. Wyville is most certainly the man who sent you that thousand-dollar greenback, and that he is in all probability the assassin of Hubert Garson!"

CHAPTER XXV.

ON TRACK OF THE BOGUS NEPHEW.

HARRY FOUNTAIN knew Dr. Wyville too well, after the interviews he had had with that distinguished physician, to have the least desire to protest against either of Mr. Decker's conclusions.

As a single matter of fact, he realized that the doctor was capable of committing any crime that his greed or needs might suggest.

"Having reached these conclusions," resumed the visitor, after a brief pause, "I must now ask your earnest attention."

There was hardly any occasion to insist upon this point.

His hearers almost held their breath to hear the remarks of the strange little man who had not only been a direct agent in rescuing them from an abyss resembling the bottomless pit, but who seemed to know far more about the affairs of Harry Fountain than did Harry himself.

"It is doubtful," pursued Decker, "if either of you has given an especial attention to that Weehawken murder. To begin with, Miss Pauline does not seem to have even heard of it. To be sure, she seems to have heard the name of Percy Wyville, and that is a subject to which we shall return later. As to Mr. Fountain, he seems to have had trouble enough to keep soul and body together, and I venture to say that the fate of Hubert Garson has hardly entered his mind, inasmuch as he didn't even suspect how closely he was associated with it. But with me the case is different. That murder has been my constant preoccupation ever since the date of its occurrence. I have studied it from every point of view, and I am now in possession of a more just view of it than any other man in existence."

He arose and stepped to the door, which he opened, looking out upon the staircase with a keen glance, and at the same time uttering two or three of those dry and peculiar coughs which had more than once been remarked by his auditors in the course of his observations.

Then he listened a moment, noting the sound of retreating footsteps which came up to his hearing from a point of the staircase two or three stories lower down than himself.

"It's merely a friend of mine, whom I have dispatched about his business," he said, as he closed the door carefully and came back to his chair. "This friend is a policeman. I am happy to say that we are in a fair way to get along without his services, and I do not quite like to have him lingering about the staircase longer, even if his garb is as plain and unattractive as—as—"

"As that you are wearing, for instance," interrupted Pauline, with a smile that was as discreet as significant.

"Well, yes—as plain as mine," admitted Decker, contentedly. "And now that we are quite by ourselves," he drew his chair nearer, "I have something very important to say to you, with the understanding that you will keep all I say a profound secret."

"It is hardly necessary to say that we are at your disposal, sir, in that as in all other respects," said Harry.

Pauline confirmed this assurance with an earnest inclination of her shapely head.

"I shall count upon it," said Decker.

He reflected a few moments earnestly upon what he was about to say, and then continued:

"The first thing that struck me about that murder was the fact that a borrower, a mere beggar, comparatively speaking, should be the victim of the assassin, when right by his side, and even in company, was such a man as Percy Wyville, who had just inherited a million and a half from an uncle, and who was presumably in

possession of a few thousands. Entering upon my investigations with this theory, I was not long in discovering that Percy Wyville was really the one the assassin had designed to kill, and that to Percy was given the mysterious rendezvous in which the other found his death!"

At these words Pauline became as flushed and livid as she had been pale a few moments before.

Joseph Decker did not fail to notice the fact, but he proceeded without pausing to offer any remark about it.

"To render such a mistake possible, nothing less is required than that a mistake of persons took place in the delivery of a certain anonymous letter that was dispatched by the assassin not long before the murder. Such a mistake is admissible if Percy Wyville and Hubert Garson resembled each other, and that resemblance has been fully established by the evidence of half a dozen persons who saw them together at the hotel."

Pauline grew more and more absorbed every moment in what Mr. Decker was saying.

"Just how it came to pass," he continued, "that Hubert was killed, and that Percy came on to his uncle's, is still a subject of my investigations, and one that presents many a difficult and knotty problem, but a number of well-defined facts have nevertheless been established upon a small foundation. For instance, I have learned that Doctor Wyville has been very badly in need of money for many a month past, and at times has been so closely pressed and hunted by his creditors that he did not know in what direction to turn for relief. But that is not all."

He drew his chair still nearer to the young couple, and lowered his voice to a real whisper, as he proceeded:

"The day of Percy Wyville's arrival in Philadelphia, the doctor gave a dinner and a reception in his honor. The preparations for this dinner were in progress, with much going and coming of the servants and others, when I saw Miss Nora Wyville, the doctor's daughter, at one of his windows, and in the act of looking anxiously out. Was she looking for her expected cousin, or was she looking for a lover! Be that as it may, a man soon appeared, with due precautions for remaining unseen, and gave a note to Miss Nora's maid, who chanced to pass on an errand. This man was Percy Wyville, who had arrived early in the day from New York, but who had mysteriously abstained from calling on his uncle and cousin. He recognized the maid at a glance, even as she recognized him, and they shook hands precisely as people do after a considerable separation."

The auditors bent nearer.

They could see by the very manner of Decker that something striking was coming.

"In other terms, the maid and Percy had met before, and were old acquaintances. The sending of the note is as much as to say that Percy also knew Miss Wyville. He was, in fact, the lover for whom she had been watching from the window. For things to have reached this pass the couple must have been long acquainted!"

"Of course," said Pauline and Harry in chorus.

"But such was not at all the situation," pursued Decker. "The doctor's daughter had never been in Nova Scotia, and Percy Wyville had never been in Philadelphia until that day. The real Percy Wyville had never seen either mistress or maid, and wouldn't have known either of them from Adam, no more than they would have known him! In other terms, the man Miss Nora had met and loved; the man she was waiting for on that day; the man who recognized the maid and gave her a note; the man who has married the doctor's daughter, and is now living at the doctor's house as his son-in-law and nephew—this man is not the real Percy Wyville!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

PROBLEM UPON PROBLEM.

THE truth in the case had been so clearly vindicated by Decker that his auditors could not have failed to see it.

Yet what a problem he gave them!

For nearly a minute they stared at him in a stupor of amazement.

Harry was the first to speak.

"You have settled a very important point then?" he queried. "The man who has thus encamped at the doctor's is an impostor?"

"A fraud of the most pyramidal proportions," affirmed Decker, emphatically. "You can see that at a glance!"

"Then where is the real Percy?"

"That's something I'd like to know!"

"I—I can tell you," faltered Pauline, ready to swoon, as a cold sweat broke out on her forehead. "The real Percy—is the man who was found dead at the foot of that cliff in Weehawken!"

"Ah, what ails you?" asked Decker, turning a strangely-searching gaze upon her.

"Unfortunate that I am!" exclaimed Pauline, bursting into tears. "I can never forgive myself—never!"

"Why not?" asked Decker,

"Because I am the innocent cause of that

man's death! It was I who handed him that letter appointing the fatal rendezvous! His blood is upon my hands!"

"Oh! oh! oh!" exclaimed Decker, in a tone *crescendo*. "Do you mean to say that you have been in New York?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that you saw there Percy Wyville?"

"I did."

"You are the unknown messenger who brought him a letter at the hotel?"

"I am, sir."

The questioner looked as delighted as if he had received a million, and as astonished as if the whole sum had been rained from the sky upon him.

"What luck!" he ejaculated. "I came for a mutton-chop, and have got the whole sheep!"

"I am saved!" cried Harry. "All we have to do is to go and find the chief of police and tell him the truth."

"What truth?" asked Decker.

"Why, that we have discovered the assassin!"

"Have we discovered him? If so, just tell me where he is, that I may lay hands upon him."

"Isn't he the doctor?"

"I am inclined to think that he is, but we have no proofs to offer. I am also inclined to think that he is the man who sent you that thousand-dollar greenback, but we haven't a particle of evidence in that direction. As to the false Percy Wyville, there will have to be a very careful investigation before we can come to any definite conclusion about him. He may be either Hubert Garson, or he may be both Garson and young Wyville."

"Then who is the dead man—for a dead man was certainly found under the cliff?"

"Oh, he may be a third person; but whether he is to rank as a vital personage in the play, or whether he is to turn out a mere dummy, is another problem which we shall not be able to solve between now and twilight."

Harry realized, from these observations, that he was a mere boy in comparison with Decker, in the investigation of such mysteries as had now come under his notice, and he resolved not to be too forward with his opinions.

"I've hinted already," pursued Decker, "that the doctor was terribly in need of money at the moment of his nephew's return, and for a long time before. He has been preyed upon for years by a couple of the most sinister reprobates there is in the city—a certain Jew broker, named Brail, and a certain Mrs. Levison. This pair are not merely associated to hunt him, but they are related, and they must have some terrible hold upon him, to judge by the manner in which they have been plundering him. Since the return of the nephew, however, the doctor seems to be rolling in wealth, and has paid the most of his debts. Where his money comes from is more than I can tell you, but I hear that the nephew has given up his million and a half to his father-in-law. All these things, my young friends, are so many new problems added to the old ones, and I am free to say that we have a great deal to do before we shall remain masters of the situation!"

He turned toward Pauline, who still remained pale and excited.

"And now to hear what this dear girl has to say for herself," he said, taking her hand. "I little suspected, when I came here, that she would give me such a surprise. It seems that she has seen the real Percy Wyville, and one of the first services I shall ask of her is to take a look at the doctor's son-in-law, and tell me whether he is the man he claims to be. It seems, too, that she knows the doctor himself—"

"Not exactly, sir," corrected Pauline. "But his name has certainly been pronounced in my presence."

"When, may I ask?"

"During my earliest childhood. I have also heard that name of Mrs. Levison!"

"Really?"

Joseph Decker seemed delighted.

"Let me see," he muttered, tapping his forehead energetically. "That would be strange. Shall I not say impossible? Nevertheless—What is your age?"

"I am almost nineteen!"

"Nineteen!" echoed Decker.

He counted rapidly on his fingers.

"That just corresponds," he said, rather to himself than to his company. "Do you remember your parents?"

"No, sir. I was abandoned by them."

As she made this confession, with an uneasy flush upon her cheeks and with downcast eyes, she stole a timid glance at Harry to see what effect it would have upon him.

But the visage of the young man was so sympathetic, and his gaze was so ardent and respectful, that she thrilled with content, and became reassured and smiling.

"My dear child," said Decker, "it is now your turn to enlighten us. You must follow the example Mr. Fountain and I have set you, and give us the particulars of your life, without any omissions. You can see for yourself that more than one event of your life is associated with the drama which occupies us, and it is possible

that you are destined to be intimately concerned with its final chapter."

"There are only two salient points in my life, sir," returned Pauline. "Cruel blows when I was little, and misery later."

"Well, relate all that to us."

"I beg of you, Pauline," pleaded Harry Fountain, almost tenderly.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PAULINE AND DR. WYVILLE.

AT these adjurations, Pauline aroused herself from a strange preoccupation which had come over her within a few minutes while she listened to her companions.

"My earliest recollections," she said, "carry me back to a Mrs. Birdsell, a sort of nurse and baby-farmer, who lived a few miles out of town. I have heard her speak of another child of my own age, which died when it was a year old."

"At one year?" exclaimed Decker, in a very singular tone, and with a keen interest. "Do you remember the name of that child?"

"Yes, thanks to the circumstance that my nurse mentioned it two or three times after I became old enough to remember. She spoke of the little girl as Julia Wyville. This all came back to me a few moments ago, while you and Mr. Fountain were speaking of the doctor."

"Julia Wyville?" repeated Harry wondering-ly. "Who can she have been?"

"She was the only child of Claude Wyville, whose wife died soon after the birth of this little one," explained Decker, staring at Pauline curiously.

"Ah, I recollect that name—Claude Wyville—now that I hear it," cried Pauline.

Mr. Decker looked pleased again.

What he heard evidently responded to some thought or information of which he had not spoken.

"Didn't you ever, during your infancy, see any of the Wyvilles?" he asked.

"The father of Julia—never. I have heard Mrs. Birdsell say that he seldom came to her house after the death of his daughter. The only Wyville I recollect is the doctor."

"Ah, you recollect him?"

"Distinctly!"

"How strange!" exclaimed Harry.

"In what circumstances?" asked Decker.

"It all comes back to me now, although I had nearly forgotten it," said Pauline, with a sigh.

"I was nearly six years of age, when, one afternoon, a man whom I had seen once or twice before came to Mrs. Birdsell and had a long talk with her, paying her money. When he had gone, she said to me:

"You see that man who is going away? He is Doctor Wyville."

"Then she took me in her arms and began to cry violently, exclaiming:

"Poor little dear!"

"A very interesting reminiscence," muttered Decker, becoming more and more attentive.

"The next day," continued Pauline, "there appeared at Mrs. Birdsell's a loud-looking, loud-speaking lady, if I may call her such—"

"A large and tall woman, with red face, and bold, black eyes, somewhat in the elongated style of the Chinese, with prominent chest, and loaded with rings and other jewelry?" interrupted Decker excitedly.

"The very same!" cried Pauline. "Do you know her?"

"I suspected what was coming. Continue, my dear child. This new-comer at the baby-farm was Mrs. Levison?"

"She was—yes, Mrs. Levison. After she had exchanged a few words with Mrs. Birdsell, the latter took me by the hand, and said:

"This is the little girl."

"Then she turned to me, and added:

"Mrs. Levison is going to take charge of you, dear, and bring you up. She will take you away with her!"

"That woman, that Mrs. Levison, regarded me with such a malicious and brutal look, and at the same time one of such intense gratification, that I recoiled in terror and hid my face in the nurse's apron, beginning to cry."

"Oh, indeed!" cried Mrs. Levison. "She's bad and ungrateful, is she? But I can soon tune her!"

"An hour later, deluged in my own tears, which I vainly sought to restrain, I was taken into Mrs. Levison's carriage, and she drove to her home in the city. She was evidently wealthy, for the place seemed to me like a palace. Handing me over to one of her servants, she said:

"Clean this creature, and let her be suitably dressed by to-morrow!"

"Thus installed in Mrs. Levison's house, I remained there about six months, every day of which was a veritable martyrdom. I was beaten severely for the slightest fault, and often for no fault at all. That woman seemed to bear me an awful hatred. One day, just as she had taken down a whip to give me another beating, the door opened unexpectedly, and a man entered."

"Doctor Wyville?"

"Yes, sir—Doctor Wyville—I thought he would save me for that once, and he did go so far as to protest, but Mrs. Levison only whipped me the harder."

"I only wish her father could see what she is getting!" was the declaration with which she finally desisted, when she saw that I was on the verge of fainting."

"Ah, she said that, did she?" cried Decker, starting to his feet excitedly. "Are you perfectly sure of that?"

"Perfectly. Every word and detail of that scene rests indelibly engraved upon my memory."

Harry Fountain made no comment, but it was easy to see that he would have gladly strangled Mrs. Levison if she had been at his mercy.

"After about six months of that torture," resumed Pauline, "Doctor Wyville appeared again, one day, with a dressmaker, to whom I was formally apprenticed. With this new mistress I remained many years, or until she died. Since then I have been drifting from pillar to post. For some weeks past I have been so miserable that I resolved to make an end of it, and if Mr. Fountain had not come just as he did, you would have been spared the recital of these miseries."

"And Mrs. Birdsell," said Decker, "have you seen her lately?"

"Never since I left her, but I heard not long ago that she is at the old place."

"Give me some particulars of her location."

Pauline complied.

"If she's there, I shall soon find her," said Decker. "But—what ails you?"

The question was addressed to Pauline.

She had started to her feet, and clasped her hand to her heart, while her face had blanched to the hue of death.

"Oh, I understand him now," she cried.

"Understand who?"

"That little old man in New York, who gave me the letter to carry to Percy Wyville."

"How understand him?"

"Why, he seemed to recognize me, or else I reminded him strongly of some one. He even started at the name of Pauline, and again when I said I had been abandoned by my parents. Oh, that man! that little old man! He was just such a figure as Doctor Wyville would make disguised in a wig and false beard! His voice, too! As sure as I live, Mr. Decker, I believe that little old man was Doctor Wyville!"

"You do?" returned Decker, starting to his feet. "Then it's time for you to know me better. My name is not Decker, but Mortimer—Joseph Mortimer—and I am one of the inspectors of police of this city!"

His auditors recoiled in mute wonder.

"And now to tell you what I expect of you, Harry Fountain, in order that your honor may be saved and your innocence proven, and also what I expect of you, Pauline, in order that you may be cleared from the villainy of Mrs. Levison and Doctor Wyville, and restored to the name and place to which you have a right!"

Inspector Mortimer motioned the young couple to resume their seats, and drew up his chair beside them, their heads all bending nearer together in an earnest consultation and discussion.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE GULF BETWEEN THEM!

ABOUT eight days subsequent to the scenes we have related, Nora sat in her neat little parlor, which had been newly refurnished expressly for her on the occasion of her marriage.

Not far from two months had passed since her union with Herbert Garson, who had taken the name of Percy Wyville, and during this time she had professed to be perfectly happy.

After a short bridal tour, Percy, as we must continue to call him for the present, had accepted a good situation with one of the leading bankers of the city, and was already in a fair way to become able to support his wife in the style to which she had been accustomed.

Almost every hour outside of his business was passed in Nora's presence, and he remained as devoted to her as a husband as he had been as a lover.

Nevertheless, certain shadows of unrest and uneasiness had at times entered the soul of the young bride, and she had more than once caught herself wondering if her happiness would endure always.

The darkest of these shadows grew out of the fact that she could not quite make out the relations of her father and husband, who were never alone with each other if they could help it, who never went anywhere together, who never exchanged a word outside of those formal associations imposed by the fact of their living under the same roof, and who seemed to study in every way to have as few points of contact with each other as was possible.

What did all this mean?

This was the problem which came again and again to plunge Nora into the "brown study" which now absorbed her.

She had remarked that they never so much as looked each other in the face, if they could by any possibility escape doing so, and all their conduct attested the deepest sort of aversion, disrespect, disgust, and even hatred and horror.

It was as if there were some horrible abyss between them.

Once or twice, on entering their presence abruptly, she had heard raised and angry voices,

and caught accents of menace and reproach which could not be mistaken.

Of course both became silent at her appearance, but both were deathly pale, and had been too agitated not to remain so, although they had assumed meaningless smiles and exchanged words and phrases almost devoid of meaning, with the too transparent pretense of seeming to continue the conversation which had preceded her arrival.

What a situation for the young wife to be compelled to note these facts and turn them over and over in her mind without being able to understand them!

She had returned to speak of these things one day to Percy, but he professed to be unable to quite understand the drift of her questions or the nature of her anxieties.

"It is certainly beyond my power to guess how such an idea can have entered your head, my little wife," he declared, kissing her tenderly. "I am greatly attached to your father, and have no doubt that he thinks a great deal of me. You must remember that he is a strange kind of man, and that our paths are very divergent."

Interrogated in his turn by his daughter, the doctor's response had been of the same complexion.

"You are quite out of your reckoning, Nora," he had assured her, with a nervous embrace. "I think a great deal of your husband, as is natural. Possibly he may have a grudge against me for sundry short-comings with his father all these years ago, but he is too generous and sensible to allow anything of the sort to come between us."

If Nora was forced to content herself with these responses, she was by no means satisfied with them.

The hideous gulf remained, and Nora could not have failed to see it.

She saw that it was a constant effort for them to avoid an open rupture, and that fact was in itself enough to render null and worthless every assurance of mutual respect and affection they could have uttered.

There was still another shadow on the young bride's happiness which is deserving of a mention.

Placed in possession of the fortune of her Uncle Claude, by the absolute renunciation and transfer of the same by her husband, she had been astonished to learn that the doctor would not have been able to give her a dollar on the occasion of her marriage if it had not been for the timely arrival of this heritage in his coffers, he having dissipated every dollar of a previous handsome fortune she had inherited from one of her aunts.

Nor was this the worst of it.

What worried her the most was that he had been continually borrowing of her since her marriage, and seemed to be in a fair way to get rid, at an early day, of every dollar in her possession.

In fact, this state of things had been carried to such a point she deemed it her duty to call her husband's attention to the matter.

"Never mind that," was the substance of all Percy's responses upon this subject. "Let your father do as he pleases with that money. I am making my way in the world, and we love each other and are happy. What more could we ask?"

The nervousness displayed by her husband on all these occasions was so marked that the young wife could not have failed to regard it as another link in the chain of mystery all his previous conduct had presented.

"He couldn't care for that money less if it had come from the hands of some blood-stained pirate!" she thought. "I shall have to give up all attempts to understand either father or Percy. But there is certainly some horrible mystery between them!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

NORA'S NEW MAID.

Upon that day, therefore, as Nora sat alone in her parlor, she was far more worried, nervous and dissatisfied than she would have cared to avow, even to herself.

A sort of suspicion had crept into her heart concerning her father and husband, although she would have been unable to define its exact nature.

A more visible disquiet was presented by the fact that her husband had been called upon repeatedly by a "police official"—as Percy called him—to explain his relations with Hubert Garson during their brief acquaintance in New York.

It seemed to Nora that these visits ought to have ceased, unless there were some very serious complication in the matter, and something concerning which she was still utterly in the dark.

As was natural, therefore, Nora was very much preoccupied with these reflections, when her maid announced her approach by a light knock and entered her presence.

"Are you in want of anything, Gertie?" asked Nora, arousing herself.

"I—I wanted to see you a moment, Mrs. Wyville," was the reply. "I am very sorry to say that I am forced to leave you."

"To leave me, Gertie? You are going away?" cried Mrs. Wyville, in surprise.

"Not willingly, madam, I assure you," explained the maid, "but certain circumstances have arisen—"

"What sort of circumstances?"

"I must return to the country."

"For a long stay?"

"That is more than I know, madam."

Nora looked her astonishment.

"A little inheritance has been left me," continued Gertie, "and there are certain legal difficulties involved which can only be cleared up by my presence. The amount is not large—perhaps five or six hundred dollars—but it would be wrong for me to throw it away."

"Quite right, Gertie," declared Nora, "but I am very sorry to lose you. I shall miss you, I know. You have been faithful and devoted and I have got used to your ways."

"You are too good, madam," returned Gertie, as her eyes grew moist. "I shall never expect to have another such kind mistress."

"When do you intend to go?"

"To-morrow, madam, if you can spare me."

"So soon? And without my week's notice?"

"If you will be so kind."

"But how can I get along? I'm not sure to find any one who can suit me in such a short time as you give me."

"I've thought of that, madam, and have taken care to find a girl I can recommend as even better than myself—a young girl every way right, who is a good dressmaker, and one I warrant to give entire satisfaction."

"You are well acquainted with her?"

"Yes, madam. We are a little related. She has lost her parents, and has come to Philadelphia to find a place."

"Has she been here a long time?"

"Eight days only."

"Why didn't you speak about her sooner?"

"For the simple reason that I didn't know I was going."

"Will you be responsible for her?"

"In every way, madam."

"But perhaps she will not care to do my work or to do it in my way—"

"Oh, have no fear about that, Mrs. Wyville," interrupted Gertie, eagerly. "Ernestine—for that is her name—is already aware of what will be expected of her, and she will be only too glad to come."

"Very well. When can I see her?"

"Immediately, if you wish to."

"Where is she?"

"I left her in my room."

"Indeed!" and Nora hardly knew whether to smile or frown. "You have not lost any time about it, have you? Bring her here."

The new maid soon appeared.

She was not far from twenty years of age, and very pretty.

She was attired simply and becomingly, but with such instinctive taste that her garb seemed almost elegant.

Her air of gentleness and modesty pleased Mrs. Percy Wyville at sight, who could not help remarking in her air of distinction quite above the place for which she was applying.

As to the new-comer, she was very quiet, as well as a little pale and nervous, and hardly raised her eyes after a first rapid glance at Nora.

A few questions were asked and answered, all of them making a good impression upon Mrs. Wyville, who engaged the new-comer on the spot.

It was further arranged that the new maid should enter upon her duties immediately, in order that Gertie might get her acquainted with the ways of the house before taking her departure on the morrow.

Toward night, after a busy day, Gertie excused herself for a few minutes, and went out to a corner of an adjacent square, where she found herself face to face with a man who seemed to be waiting for her.

We need not present him formally to our readers.

He was none other than Inspector Mortimer.

"Well?" was his query.

"It's done," was the answer.

"She has been accepted in your place?"

Gertie bowed.

"And without any suspicions?"

"Without the least trouble, sir. But it has been no easy matter for me to consent to these arrangements. Mrs. Wyville has been very good to me, and I have become very much attached to her."

"Well, you can be easy in regard to my motives and intentions," assured the inspector. "You may be sure that no harm shall come to your young mistress. Remember that you are well paid, and that such a turn as I have proposed to you will do you good, after you have been steadily in one place so many years. Have a good time for a couple of weeks, and I will see that Ernestine does not replace you longer than that time."

The couple soon separated, and Gertie returned to the house, passing the night with the

new maid, and taking her departure early in the morning, not without many tears, and with the best of recommends.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE INSPECTOR AND HARRY.

On taking leave of Gertie, Mr. Decker, as we may as well continue to call him, took his way quietly toward the residence of Dr. Wyville, in whose house, it will be remembered, he had been for some time residing.

Having rung the bell, he was admitted by Mrs. Mawney, the doctor's housekeeper, who smiled upon the lodger as only a landlady or housekeeper can smile when they have dealings with such a nice, liberal gentleman as Mr. Joseph Decker had proved himself to be ever since the day when he first set foot in the house.

"A pleasant day, Mrs. Mawney," greeted the inspector, as he received his key with one hand, and tendered the housekeeper a crisp "V" with the other.

"Very, very, Mr. Decker," responded the doctor's representative, as she dropped an extremely low courtesy, and whisked the cash out of sight into some mysterious receptacle in her "breastworks" with such rapidity that the giver could not have told what had become of it. "And a very pleasant day it will prove to you, sir, I'm sure, for your nephew has arrived from the country, as you thought he might."

"Ah, indeed, the dear boy! Where is he?"

"I showed him up to your room, as you ordered, and left him in possession."

"Quite right, Mrs. Mawney. This is indeed a bright day for me, as you suggest, many thanks to you."

He inclined himself with the marked politeness he had never failed to show her, and then commenced a leisurely ascent of the stairs.

Of course Mr. Decker had no servant, for the simple reason that Mrs. Mawney rendered him every necessary service, and that he took his meals where he liked.

After opening his door and entering, Mr. Decker closed it again very carefully and locked it, with the idea, no doubt, of being quite undisturbed by the outside world during the pleasant interview he was about to have with the nephew from the country to whom Mrs. Mawney had given admittance.

Gaining his handsome parlor, he found himself in the presence of the nephew aforesaid, who was none other, of course, than Harry Fountain.

"Well, sir?" was the latter's greeting, as he arose, with marked anxiety.

"Everything is a success," answered the inspector, as he nodded pleasantly. "Miss Pauline has been accepted in the place of Gertie, and is now in the service of Mrs. Nora Wyville."

Harry took a turn or two in the room, with a nervousness he could not wholly master.

"If any harm should come to her," he then said, "I could never forgive myself for consenting to this masquerade."

"Come, come, Mr. Fountain," said the inspector, laying off his hat and light, walking overcoat. "Have I not said that I would be responsible for her? I am not exactly pleased to do this sort of thing, but all life is a compromise. Don't forget that your life is at stake, and, what is of still more account, your good name and your honor. Are you pleased to have the newspapers speaking of you as the 'probable murderer,' and to have the police of half a dozen of our principal cities on the lookout for you?"

"Certainly not, sir," replied Harry. "I should be ready to die of disgust, if you had not come so kindly to my rescue."

"And especially if that most excellent young woman hadn't become even more interested in you than your humble servant! How do you like my quarters here?"

"They are nice and comfortable—just what you require, I should say, for the projects in hand," answered Harry.

"And especially what I want for your safe-keeping!" affirmed the inspector, with a suppressed chuckle. "What better idea could I possibly have had than to conceal you in the rooms of the boss of the very men who are moving heaven and earth to find you? You may rest assured that none of my men will think of looking for you here, and that you can sleep in peace."

"And in two beds at once, if I choose, seeing that you have three made up," said Harry, with a playful nod toward an inner apartment.

"Oh, one of the three is for a new lodger I shall probably bring here in the course of the evening. While the police are searching for you so hotly, and Miss Pauline is at Mrs. Wyville's, I'm afraid your time will pass heavily on your hands, and so I am going to give you, not a companion, but a prisoner."

Harry saw that some new enigma was involved in this remark, but he knew that it would be explained in due course, and he returned to the subject of Pauline's introduction into the service of Mr. Percy Wyville as her maid.

"But of course it's all for the best," he con-

cluded, with a sigh which attested how much he had learned to think of Pauline during the few days of their acquaintance.

"Of course it is," assured the inspector, "or I should not have advised such a measure. I have no doubt, Mr. Fountain, that I shall be able to prove in due time that Pauline is the Julia Wyville of Mrs. Birdsell's baby-farm, and that she is the daughter and heiress of the late Claude Wyville, and as such entitled to the fortune that the doctor is now so rapidly squandering. Such being her situation, can you blame me for putting her in the way of knowing something about her relatives?—she who is so good and noble, whose life has been so unhappy, and who loves you so much and so devotedly?"

"Of course I do not blame you," replied Harry earnestly. "I am simply nervous about her, because I comprehend that she has been the victim of that infernal doctor from childhood, and that he may do her some further evil, but you will not blame me for this very natural solicitude, I am certain. Poor girl! I'd give my right hand to restore to her the name and place of which, to agree with you, she has been robbed."

"That's all right, my dear Mr. Fountain," said the inspector, as he extended himself upon a lounge with an air of weariness. "I'll not only excuse your anxiety, but I hope to soon put an end to it. I have new reasons to think that we shall oust in due course the man who has taken the place of Percy Wyville, who seems to have been an excellent young man, and whose murder we are bound to avenge!"

"I am glad to hear that, sir."

"Then there is the bride, whose case is really a hard one, with such a husband and such a father, and it will really be a kindness to give her such a friend as she is sure to find in her cousin."

"I see that you are doing everything for the best, sir," declared Harry. "Pauline acquitted herself well of the role she had undertaken?"

"No one could have done better, to judge by what Gertie told me. What strengthens her especially for this work is the thought that she is doing something to clear your name."

"But have you no fear that the doctor will recognize her, despite the years which have passed since we saw her at the baby-farm and apprenticed her? And if, as we believe, he is the man of whom she demanded alms in New York, may he not recognize in her the messenger he sent to Percy Wyville?"

"That's all possible. But he would not dare to avow any such recognition, and would treat her precisely as if he had never seen her!"

"Only," suggested Harry, as he strode nervously across the floor, "he will comprehend that she has entered the house for a purpose, and may make some attempt to get rid of her. The mere thought of any such peril is enough to make me wild, but I can do no less than submit to all your wishes, knowing that you have ample resources for her protection."

"And now to turn you to account also," said the inspector smilingly. "Are you willing to be useful?"

"Try me and see, sir," replied Harry eagerly.

"Then I am going to make a new man of you—at least to the extent of giving you a new head, so that you will not be molested by any of my boys who are not in the secret. Let us step into the next room."

He arose and lighted a lamp, for the night was now setting in, and led the way into his innermost apartment, which he kept carefully locked, and from which even Mrs. Mawney had always been vigorously excluded.

Such a scene as this room presented!

It was like the drop of a theatrical costumer.

The inspector had here every sort of a disguise that might be needed, with a great variety of paints and powders, false beards and wigs of every sort, and false suits of naval and military uniforms, to say nothing of garbs suited to all cases and conditions of private citizens.

"One would think they were in the dressing-room of an actor, wouldn't they, my young friend?" said Decker with a smile. "The fact is, I also am an actor. Only, the piece in which I play is a bit of real life, and the comedy or tragedy in which I figure is the real thing itself and not a vain and empty imitation! Sit down a moment, and let me take a good look at you, in order that I may select for you a character that will harmonize the best with your actual forms and features."

Harry sat down, as requested, and Decker studied him, lamp in hand, long and attentively.

"You are dark," he finally said, "and you have a mustache. You are rather short, and a little thick-set. I am going to make of you a Frenchman, especially as you know something of the language."

An hour later, Harry was ready to make his appearance in his new character.

"There's only one thing lacking," said Decker, after contemplating his work with an air of satisfaction, "and that is for you to be a little more snappy, vivacious and quick-stepping. You must also remember to gesticulate with

your hands constantly, in the style of a turtle turned on his back. Now for a start."

"Where are we going, sir?" asked Harry.

"To the doctor's broker. To Mr. Brail!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BROKER AND HIS VISITORS.

MR. DAVID BRAIL was generally supposed to have had a stirring history.

Two of his "stirs," in fact, were said to have had a very especial bearing upon his status and record.

One of these was an escape from an Austrian dungeon where he had been confined upon a life sentence for counterfeiting, and his subsequent flight from Trieste to America in a sailing-ship.

The other remarkable stir of which he had been guilty was a reversal of the order of his names, he having started upon his dubious mission among men as Brail David.

All these changes had mixed up the well-defined Jew of his early days to such an extent that he might as well have been called Brown, Edelstein, Sombrowsky, or Gallagher.

Like the "image" in Daniel, he was decidedly composite in his character.

If his feet were of clay, it is to be feared that his head was of brass, and his heart of mud.

A worse fraud never went unhung.

To the original crookedness of a low-lived nature, he had added about every species of vice and crime known to all the tribes and kindred of the earth.

He lived in such a mean-looking house that the tax collector would have put on his spectacles and looked twice to see if it could possibly be on his books, and in which no stranger could have possibly set foot without looking three or four times to be sure that it would not cave in upon him before he could get out of it.

This house was situated in one of the poorest and dirtiest quarters to be found in all the city.

But once within the structure, the aspect of affairs took on a notable improvement.

As mean as was the exterior and approaches of the place, it was comfortably furnished, and fairly well lighted and ventilated.

The hour was getting on toward ten o'clock in the evening, when Decker and Harry ascended the three or four steps leading to the front door of Brail's house, the former ringing the bell.

Quite an interval succeeded without bringing any response, and a second ring seemed to Decker an absolute necessity, and he took care to give it with such vigor that only a dead man or a very deaf one could fail to give it prompt attention.

A stir of footsteps soon resounded within, and the door was opened, the visitors finding themselves face to face with David Brail, or with Brail David.

His first glance at the visitors was not entirely free from the nervousness which generally characterizes a man who is conscious of possessing a great variety of secrets which have never been shared with any human being.

But there was something so calm and placid about Decker, and so gentlemanly about the newly-made Frenchman, that Mr. Brail looked relieved and content on the instant.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he asked, politely enough, but without making any movement toward giving them admittance.

"We are here to see Mr. Brail on business," returned Decker.

"What kind of business?"

"A matter with which Mr. Moses has charged us," announced Decker, with a well-defined wink of his left eye.

This latter demonstration was doubtless a sort of mystic sign in good standing for Brail changed his tone and his style, smiling affably, and opening widely his door, while he stepped a little to one side to give admittance into a dingy little hall which was lighted by a smoky lamp of very diminutive size.

"You'll excuse me, gentlemen, for receiving you myself," he said, as he closed the door, and led the way into a parlor that was much better than the hall promised. "I do not keep any servant. I regard that species of reptile as wholly useless and dangerous. I never saw one yet who was not a spy upon his employer. An old woman who comes an hour every morning is sufficient to keep my house presentable, the more especially as I live out of doors."

He made a sign for his visitors to sit down, but remained standing himself, with an air of waiting for more ample information in regard to their business.

Remarking, however, that Mr. Joseph Decker was examining the room and its contents somewhat critically, and that the other visitor was contemplating Mr. Joseph Decker, he hastened to resume, addressing his remarks to the latter:

"You mentioned that you are here as the representatives of Mr. Moses. He is one of my old friends, and I must say that he is better than his reputation."

"It is certainly to be hoped so, as he's had enough," said Decker, "inasmuch as he is charged with all sorts of crookedness, and is known to be mixed up with all sorts of scabby affairs."

"He has been badly calumniated, or, at the least, the facts concerning him have been greatly exaggerated. He's simply of the old school."

"While you, Mr. Brail," returned Decker—"you are simply of the new school, which is at once more brilliant, more audacious, and more perilous."

The Jew frowned darkly.

"What do you mean to convey by that assertion?" he asked, with that impertinent air he had assumed and so constantly maintained in his dealings with Dr. Wyville as related.

"I simply mean," explained Decker, "that if any one were to give a reasonably close attention to your 'business' operations, they'd find many a bit of rascality sufficient to send you to prison for the rest of your life!"

"Sir!" cried Brail, straightening himself up with an injured and angry air. "Look well to what you are saying, for I am not a man to endure that sort of trifling."

"And yet," said Decker, "you are a man to throw your door wide open at the name of Mr. Moses, who has just been arrested for swindling, false pretenses, starting a fictitious bank, and half a dozen similar charges. And this being the situation of your friend Moses, and it appearing that you are mixed up with him in a host of enterprises which are quite out of harmony with the Revised Statutes, it wouldn't be at all surprising if you yourself were to be locked up before daylight, Mr. Brail David—it wouldn't indeed."

"Me?" gasped Brail, whose impertinence vanished from his face with marvelous celerity. "Moses arrested? What for?"

"Haven't I told you?"

"But who has arrested him? Upon whose complaint?"

"Oh, you can readily guess that—you, Mr. David, who are so intimate with all his affairs!"

The Jew had no difficulty at all in comprehending the situation.

The fate which had overtaken his *confrere* was evidently menacing himself.

He cast a desperate glance toward the door, and would have certainly sought safety in flight, if the way of escape had been open.

"But who are you?" he demanded, with that sort of energy which belongs to desperation.

"Who am I! Nothing more nor less than an inspector of police. Here is my name."

He laid his card upon a table beside which Brail had dropped into a chair as suddenly as if his legs had dissolved partnership with the rest of his body.

The Jew lost more color at that moment than at any other crisis of his life.

His frame literally shook.

His eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

"Are—are you here to arrest me?" he asked, as a cold sweat began to appear on his forehead.

"That depends," answered Decker, after a brief interval of reflection.

"Depends upon what, sir?"

"Upon yourself."

David roused himself, with an eye indicative of a gleam of hope.

"What do you want of me?" he asked.

"What am I to do?"

"You are to meet me half-way in sundry investigations upon which I have entered," replied Decker. "You are to assist me in throwing light upon the career of your esteemed friend, Moses."

"And when I have done that?"

"Your fate will be decided in accordance with the services you render the cause of justice rather than according to your very positive demerits," declared Decker, with an insinuating smile. "Your fate, in a word, will depend upon the zeal and good faith with which you throw light upon your surroundings. To begin with, you must give me full and direct answers to all my questions, without any attempt at reserve or concealment. If you do this, I think I can save you from arrest, but only upon certain conditions."

"What are they?" asked Brail, with the aspect of lifting himself where the frankness demanded would carry him.

"You shall soon hear, since this is the business which has brought us here, this gentleman and myself."

He indicated the pretended Frenchman.

"You have of course comprehended," pursued Decker, "that we are ready to pass to your credit all the good you can do us. I agree to leave you at liberty, and you agree to respond to my questions. I hasten to add that my questions do not concern your affairs nor your personal situation, but rather the affairs of persons around you—of persons you know thoroughly, and about whom you can give the most ample details without in any way compromising yourself. Will such an arrangement suit you, Mr. Brail?"

"In every way and entirely," answered the Jew, with an earnestness which showed that he would readily sacrifice father and mother to save his own precious hide.

"Then we'll proceed to business," said Decker. "My friend here, Mr. Oudet," and he designated the disguised Harry, "is connected with one

of our leading banking establishments, and has come over here from France with a great deal of money to loan at only high rates of interest. In this capacity Mr. Oudet has been asked to loan a large sum of money to Doctor John Wyville."

David moved excitedly in his chair, and an ironical smile curled his lips.

"Of course," added Decker, "Mr. Oudet has no money to throw away, and he does not wish to make the loan in question with his eyes shut. If the affair is a safe one, he will be ready to make a handsome acknowledgment to any one who can give him suitable evidence and security of that fact. On the other hand, if the loan is not a desirable one, my friend will be duly grateful to you or any one else who can furnish suitable reasons for not risking his money. Now, I have mentioned to Mr. Oudet that you have known the doctor a long time, and have even had business relations with him, and I have taken the liberty of saying to him that you are the very one, Mr. Brail, to tell us what we want to know at this moment."

"Oh, is that all that troubles you?" exclaimed David, with a sigh of relief. "Nothing is easier than for me to enlighten you!"

"So much the better," said Decker. "Proceed."

"And all I need say," resumed Brail, "is that the man who lends doctor John Wyville a dollar under any pretense whatever is simply a fool!"

"Really? You surprise me. Why is that?"

"The doctor hasn't either property or money—not a cent!"

"Indeed! How can that be?" demanded Decker. "As you are aware, he has as large a practice as any doctor in the city. There is hardly a day that he does not have to turn away patients. His prices are high, too, not to mention that he lives like a hermit or a miser."

"All of which signifies nothing to a man of his sort," interrupted Brail. "If he had a million a day it would all be sacrificed to his mania for gambling in stocks. Why, he has lost more than a million in margins and that sort of thing to my knowledge."

"I have heard something to that effect," said Decker. "But where did the million he has lost come from? Did he have a fortune of his own?"

"Nothing to speak of. His fees have been large, but they're only a drop in the bucket. The great bulk of the money he has lost has been stolen from others."

CHAPTER XXXII.

HAULED OVER THE COALS.

THE delight with which Mr. Decker and his friend listened to the broker's declarations was apparent in their glances.

"Stolen?" repeated the former. "Explain yourself, Mr. Brail."

"Well, after squandering all that was rightfully his," proceeded the Jew, "the doctor has devoured a large fortune that was left to his daughter by an aunt. More recently he has taken some large slices from the million and a half left to his nephew by Claude Wyville. There is of course something left of this latter fortune, but no one can count upon it, seeing that there is a husband in the case, and that he could easily put a stop to the borrowing of the father-in-law."

"These are certainly very serious facts, Mr. Brail," affirmed Decker. "But I was familiar with them before I came here, and your mentioning them merely proves your sincerity. But there is one thing which strikes me as singular."

"What is it?"

"Simply this," explained Decker. "You are known as a remarkably able man, Mr. Brail, and it is also well known that you have been very fortunate in your speculations. In fact, your gains have been almost as large as the doctor's losses. How do you account for it that you are always on the winning side, while your principal, the doctor, is habitually a loser?"

"Everybody can't be a winner, sir."

"Certainly not, but—"

"I have kept my affairs quite separate from those of the doctor."

"But you speculated on your own account at the same time that you speculated for him?"

"Naturally. It was my right."

"And you not only played your game with him, but you played against him!"

"That is—you mean to say?" stammered Brail uneasily.

"Oh, you needn't worry. Of course you have credited yourself with all the winnings, and have footed up to him all the losses? It would be difficult to prove these facts, however, and, in any case, to show just what your play has been, it would be necessary for the doctor to accuse you, to make complaint and pursue you in the courts—a step he's not likely to take!"

"Oh, there's no danger of that," declared Brail, with an air at once assured and menacing.

"Of course you have a hold upon him?"

"Or something very like one!"

"That's easily seen," said Decker, with a thoughtful air. "But where did he get all the money he has lost with you?"

"I've already told you?"

"No—not completely."

"I assure you, sir—"

"Take care, Mr. Brail! Your frankness in this investigation must be entire and absolute," warned Decker. "The doctor may have had thirty thousand dollars from his father. His daughter may have had two hundred thousands from her aunt. The doctor may have earned thirty thousand a year for ten years past, if we strike an average. But he has had to live, and has had to meet considerable expense in one way and another."

"Well, you seem to know his affairs by heart—you do!" muttered Brail.

"It's my business to know them. You see, therefore, that when he had devoured all these sums, there was still a large balance that he was obliged to find."

"He has gained sometimes—"

"Naturally. But he has lost immediately, and many times the amount of his winnings. I must insist upon an answer, therefore. Where has he found the difference?"

"How do I know? Here and there, probably, with his borrowings, and what not."

"Has he not taken a great deal from patients he has treated?" asked Decker, looking into the Jew's eyes.

Brail hesitated a moment.

It was clear enough that he didn't like the route taken by the inquiry.

"I imagine so," he then answered.

"And not only imagine so," returned Decker. "You know it!"

"From certain words which have escaped the doctor at one time and another, I could do no less than reach that conclusion."

"Now among these persons who have thus been 'bled' by the doctor," observed Decker, after a brief pause, "there was a certain widow, a Mrs. Fountain."

"I dare say," returned Brail, with a movement of surprise. "I had no acquaintance with her."

"You—no. But you were and you are too well posted about the affairs of the doctor not to be thoroughly informed of his relations to the lady in question. It has long been an object with you to know that man's secrets. You had him completely at your mercy."

Brail neither moved nor spoke.

"I see that you are not quite disposed to live up to our understanding," pursued Decker. "Take care, again! What I want of you is absolute and sincere honesty and frankness, or I may possibly be obliged to give you the little shock of knowing that the warrant for your arrest has been already signed!"

Brail started and grew pale again.

"Tell us what you know, therefore," added Decker, sternly, "or you'll soon have occasion to repent of your silence!"

The idea suddenly struck Brail that the Frenchman under his gaze was a false Frenchman, who might turn out in due course to be a real policeman, and might even have in his pocket the disquieting document which had been named.

"Well," he finally said, nervously, as he again moved uneasily, "I don't know why I should risk my neck for that stupid doctor. The scamp is not too interesting, certain! Let him get out of his trouble as he can!"

"Good! that's more like it," cried Decker. "I thought you'd oblige me!"

"But I ask you to pledge your honor, Mr. Inspector, that no harm shall come to me, if I tell you all I know."

"I promise you."

"And Mr. Oudet also?" pursued Brail, turning to the pretended Frenchman.

"*Certainement—oui*," declared Harry, with an inclination of his head and a flourish of his hand.

"Then I'll tell you the truth. I do so the more readily because I am in nowise concerned in the doctor's villainies, and because what I say cannot possibly be used against me."

"Proceed," enjoined Decker.

"Well, I am familiar with the name of Mrs. Fountain, and I know her relations to the doctor as well as I know my own. You will readily comprehend what a strong interest I had in keeping myself posted about him and all his proceedings."

"Of course. Otherwise he would have escaped you. You wanted to bleed him to the last drop. Go on."

"I have accordingly taken note of all he has done," pursued Brail, "and I have only to open my mouth to ruin him forever. He knows it."

"And that is why he has put up with you and your accounts so long! You are as clever as any man can be, I must confess. But to come back to Mrs. Fountain. She has given her money to the doctor?"

"She has!"

"To disinherit her son? For there is a son, a legitimate heir, as you must know."

"The one who is said to be mixed up in a certain murder affair of a few weeks ago?"

"Yes, that's the man!"

"Well, it's lucky for the doctor that this son has fallen into disgrace, for he could have otherwise made things very hot for Wyville."

"How so?"

"Why, that doctor must have skipped between this son and a fortune of not less than fifty thousand dollars."

"How did he do it?"

"In the simplest way in the world. He treated the old lady, and had no difficulty in securing her complete confidence to the exclusion of everybody else. This son had received a small fortune on coming of age, and had gone through it quickly as young people will. He had then demanded more money of his mother, and she had naturally refused him, with the result that the young man went West to fight the Indians, or to take up a farm, or to do something else desperate—I've not heard exactly what. Taking advantage of this state of things the doctor told Mrs. Fountain she had not long to live—which can be comprehended, with such a medical attendant as that infernal poisoner. Then he told her that she ought to leave all she had to some sure friend—himself for instance—who would take good care of it, adding the interest to it, and holding it in trust for the son against such time as he should return from his wanderings."

The inspector and Harry exchanged a rapid glance.

"Can these facts be proven by any other witness than yourself?" asked the former.

"Certainly—by several. But what would be the use of proving them? The old woman is dead; the son is likely to be hanged, if the police can get hold of him; and the doctor has spent every cent of the money!"

"Yes—with your help."

"Oh, I did not get all of it, or even the largest share of it!"

"No? There is another person involved?"

"And one who comes dearer than I do, I assure you!" said Brail, with a laugh.

"You mean Mrs. Levison?"

"What! You know her?"

"That's a part of my business."

A brief silence succeeded.

Mr. Decker reflected a few moments.

"We are very well satisfied with you, Mr. Brail," he then said. "Another word or two, and very well will become entirely. How long has Mrs. Levison known the doctor?"

"Oh, a long time. I should say at least twenty years."

"Before her marriage?"

"Yes."

"Where did he make her acquaintance?"

"At the house of his brother, Claude Wyville!"

"Is it possible?" cried Decker, with a start.

"What was she doing there?"

"She was a chambermaid of Mrs. Claude Wyville."

"Who died in childbirth?"

"Exactly."

"Under the medical care of her brother-in-law, Doctor John Wyville?"

"Yes, sir."

"And from that day to this the relations of Doctor Wyville and Mrs. Levison have been constant?"

"And she has devoured him alive—yes, sir!"

The eyes of Inspector Mortimer gleamed in a very extraordinary fashion, and he seemed almost agitated, for a man of his profession, but his agitation was that of a man who is marching to victory, so far as his features could be depended upon as an index to what was beneath them.

"One final favor, Mr. Brail," he said abruptly, as he arose, "and we shall be done with you for the present."

"What is it, sir?"

"I want you to give me a letter of introduction to Mrs. Levison!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FOX DULY TRAPPED.

THE broker could not repress a violent start at this demand, and his face flushed deeper.

If he had taken stock, earlier in the interview, of the fable concerning the pretended Frenchman, he had long since ceased to accept it.

He comprehended now that Dr. Wyville was the objective point of the interrogatory to which he had been subjected, but that fact did not seem to concern him very particularly, and he was only too willing to reveal all he knew about that personage for the sake of securing his own immunity.

He felt all the more willing to take this course because the doctor had now almost ceased to deal with him and he had been forced to realize that he would never be able to extort any further large sums of money from him under the pretense of unsuccessful speculations.

But when it came to Mrs. Levison, this was another matter.

He was still actively engaged with her in a score of operations tending to their mutual advantage, and his relations with her were entirely different from his relations with the doctor, inasmuch as he knew nothing of her secrets, and had no other hold upon her than was afforded by self-interest.

She had, in fact, made use of him in various ways to gain important ends, without letting him know the secret of her power over various persons of no little consequence with whom she

had placed him in contact, including Dr. Wyville, and hence he shrunk from doing anything which might provoke her anger, or even appear to her to be taking a liberty with her.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, stiffly. "I have gone as far as I can go. Mrs. Levison," he added, "would never forgive me for sending you to her."

"Don't be too sure of that," returned Decker, perfectly unmoved. "The man who has saved you from occupying a cell at the police station at this moment, may also be in a situation, and even in the mood, to show her a like favor."

"Well, all you have to do, sir," protested Brail, "is to present yourself at her house and ask to see her. As you know the way, there is not the least necessity of my intervention—not the least."

"Nevertheless," persisted Decker, "I would prefer to have a word of introduction from such a well-known friend as yourself, as I am sure that it would insure me a much better reception."

"Pardon me, sir, but I am not so high in her favor as you seem to suppose," declared the Jew, "and I am not so vain as to suppose that I exercise the least influence upon her."

"My dear Mr. Brail," said Decker, "I see that you join to your many other virtues that of modesty. But don't forget that one of the virtues you are never to lose sight of is prudence—that prudence which is the mother of safety."

"Prudence?"

"Certainly. You see at a glance that it would be highly imprudent to refuse me the service I have demanded. 'Tickle me and I'll tickle you!' This is the nature of our relations, as I explained to you at some length at the beginning. Besides, I'll candidly tell you what my business with Mrs. Levison is, so that you can dismiss all inquietude about it. What entices me toward her is precisely what has drawn me toward you, namely: a desire to acquire all possible information concerning the character of Doctor Wyville. The inquiry which occupies me concerns him and not her. I will only add: this last service is so important in my sight that I cannot allow you to refuse me. If you do, you'll go to jail without any further ceremony."

"If—if you are so serious as that about it, sir," stammered Brail, "I can do no less than respond to your wishes."

He seated himself at a table where he had been writing letters earlier in the evening, and took up a pen, dipping it into the ink.

"What am I to write?" he asked.

"What I will now dictate:

"MY DEAR ESTHER:—

"Please receive the bearer of this note as you would receive me in person. You can have in him the same confidence that you have in me—absolute and complete. He has some very grave revelations to make to you, and which will be useful to you. Excuse me for not accompanying him, as I am about leaving town for a few days on important business.

"Faithfully yours,

"DAVID BRAIL."

Looking over the shoulder of the broker, Decker saw that every word of his dictation had been duly inserted.

"Now address it," he added.

The broker hastened to comply.

"Is that all?" he asked, arising.

"Certainly—all."

The pretended Frenchman also arose, while his companion stowed away the broker's letter carefully in a large pocketbook.

"That's all," resumed Decker, "and the proof of the fact is that I must now ask you to give my friend and myself the honor of your company."

Brail fairly danced.

"Where to?" he asked, turning pale.

"Oh, not to Headquarters, but simply to a place of safety which I have provided."

"Can't you leave me here?"

"Of course not, for the simple reason that the order has already been given for your arrest, and you would be stirred out of here before daylight!"

The Jew gasped for breath.

He had thought of his arrest for years as an event that would come sooner or later, but he said to himself that he was now less prepared for it than ever.

Once in limbo where would he fetch up?

He realized only too keenly that the house he had been erecting all these years was of such a vitreous character that a single stone well planted would wreck it beyond all redemption.

"On the other hand," added Decker, "I am in a position to offer you a sure retreat, with no other proviso than that you do not stir out of it until I have made the necessary arrangements to that end."

The broker caught at this proposition with feverish eagerness.

"You really mean to befriend me?" he demanded, with that suspicion which ever attends an uneasy conscience.

"Have I not done so already?" returned Decker. "If I had desired to arrest you, couldn't I have done so long ago? My intention

is to take you to the house of my friend, Mr. Oudet."

"Oui, certainement," affirmed Harry, with a display of gestures suited to the occasion.

"Then let's be off," proposed the Jew, looking around nervously. "I'll simply take a change of linen and a few necessary articles in a valise."

Not far from midnight, the three men alighted from a carriage near the residence of Doctor Wyville.

"Abraham and Isaac!" cried the Jew, glancing wildly around. "Where are you taking me? To the doctor's?"

"Only to his house," exclaimed Decker. "My friend has a handsome suit of rooms on one of the upper floors."

Producing his night key, the inspector gave admittance to the trio, and the Jew heaved a sigh of relief at finding himself in the seclusion of his new quarters.

"Here no one will think of looking for you, Mr. Brail," observed Decker, as he turned up the light he had left burning. "Besides, Mr. Oudet will remain constantly in your company and will watch over your safety as assiduously as a brother. As I am going out again, I have a word to say to him on business in private to which end you will kindly excuse us."

He led the way into an adjoining apartment.

"I was never more in the dark," were the first words of Harry.

"There can be nothing more natural and simple, however," explained Decker. "I have brought him here that he may not warn either Mrs. Levison or the doctor. He is the only man who could notify either of the investigation we are engaged in, and here he is, like a fox in a trap."

"Bravo!" commented Harry.

"I am pleased, I must confess, with his capture, and you see already that you were quite right in believing that the doctor had robbed your mother. It is a platonic satisfaction, to be sure, to have these proofs since the doctor has got away with your money, but that is a point I expect to return to later. In the mean time, I leave this man in your safe-keeping. Take good care that he does not see any one, not even Mrs. Mawney, and take equally good care that no one sees him."

"Shall you leave him here long?"

"As long as may be necessary."

"And you, sir?"

"You may not see me again for several days."

"May I ask where you are going?"

"In the first place, to see Mrs. Levison."

"And after that?"

"I cannot yet say."

Harry saw that his preserver did not care to say more about his proposed movements, and refrained from further questions on that point.

"But what if this broker should get suspicious or uneasy, and take it into his head to leave me?"

"You must prevent it, even if you have to resort to force. Besides, you will have no trouble with him, after what I have said about the danger of his arrest. He's a cowardly chap, and you'll have no trouble with him. Let me find him here when I return."

"Depend upon it, sir."

"You'll excuse me, Mr. Fountain, for thus turning you to account," added the inspector. "But I dare say you will see Pauline occasionally, and that will render your detention here lighter."

"Be assured, sir, that I am entirely at your disposition, body and soul."

"You see that I have recognized the fact already," returned Decker, with a grave smile. "If anything serious should occur here you will send word to the lady at number twenty-six, where I had prepared for your reception, at the moment when, thanks to me, you made your escape from the two policemen who were carrying you off to prison. All these things being now understood, return to the prisoner, and do not let him out of your sight. Mrs. Mawney has already received orders to supply you with ample dinners, and you may be sure that she will leave nothing undone to earn her money. As to your disguise, you can lay it off in Brail's presence, with the explanation that you have no further use for it."

"Everything shall be as you wish, sir," answered Harry.

"Then I will now leave you, as I shall require a little time to get myself up for the proposed visit to Mrs. Levison. Good-by for the present."

Shaking the hand of the young fugitive, he withdrew to the room devoted to his disguises, and locked himself in, his final remark to Harry having been that he would let himself out by the side door when he had completed his preparations for the task now claiming his attention.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE INSPECTOR AND MRS. LEVISON.

IT WAS NEAR ONE O'CLOCK in the morning when the inspector, in a new disguise, presented himself at the house of Mrs. Levison.

This was not exactly the hour for a visit, especially a first one, but Decker had made an especial study of the habits of the Jewess ever since his arrival as a lodger at the house of Dr. Wyville, and he knew that she was accustomed to retire very late, whether she had company in the evening or whether she passed the evening at the theater or elsewhere.

He had little doubt, therefore, of being able to see her, as late as was the hour, and his expectations were realized.

Not only was Mrs. Levison astir, but she had not yet returned home, and her chambermaid sat waiting, so that she appeared promptly at the door at the first ring of the bell.

The man she saw before her was old and gray, with short hair, and a long beard, which seemed to have been carefully neglected since its beginnings, and which subserved every purpose of a mask, so completely did it conceal the face beneath it.

The eyes of the visitor were hidden behind massive spectacles.

His garb was rather poor and worn, and the hat he had hastened to remove at the appearance of the servant, was limp and creased, besides being considerably the worse for wear.

A considerable stoop was observable in the shoulders of the stranger, as if he were in the habit of bowing too low and too much, in accordance with his very quiet and humble manners.

"I would like to see Mrs. Levison," he announced, as the door opened.

"Madam has not yet come in from an evening party," returned the maid, "and besides this is not the hour for a call."

"I am well aware of that," replied the visitor with a low bow, "but I come from one of her particular friends—from Mr. David Brail, with very important communications which require instant attention. Mr. Brail has given me a letter of introduction."

He produced the missive as he spoke.

"That makes a difference, of course," said the maid. "You can come in and wait, if such is your desire."

"Many thanks, miss."

He stepped into the hall, after carefully wiping his feet on the mat, and the servant closed the door behind him.

"But I cannot promise that Mrs. Levison will see you," added the latter. "That will probably depend in a measure upon the mood she is in."

"In any case, I can wait. Please give her this letter as soon as she returns."

The girl took the letter and glanced at the address with an air which attested that she recognized the handwriting, and led the way to the reception-room, where she invited the visitor to be seated.

Then she returned to the hall, seating herself in a chair, and remained on the watch ready to open the door at the first ring of her mistress.

It was about three-quarters of an hour later when Mrs. Levison made her appearance.

She had evidently taken her supper in pleasant society, for her air was full of animation, and she appeared in excellent humor.

"No one has called, Rose?" she said, as her maid assisted her in removing her wrappings.

"Only a person who is now waiting for you, ma'am," replied Rose.

"At this hour?"

"That is what I said to him, but he insisted on waiting."

"Who is he?"

"A stranger who has never been here before, and whose appearance—"

"You should have shown him the door. He may be some thief or beggar!"

"He said that he came from one of the best friends of madam—from Mr. David Brail."

"He did? Singular—"

"Here is a letter he gave me to hand to you, with the air of believing that you would see him as soon as you have taken note of its contents."

Mrs. Levison took the letter with keen interest, giving her first attention to its exterior.

"Yes, that is his handwriting," she commented, as she tore open the envelope, "but I am surprised at receiving it, as I saw him late this afternoon."

She passed into her boudoir, and advanced to the fireplace, where a pleasant wood fire was burning, and dropped into an easy-chair, extending her feet toward the blaze, and read the communication, while Rose proceeded to exchange the boots of her mistress for slippers.

"A queer letter," was the comment of Mrs. Levison, as she turned the epistle over and over with an air of uneasiness and wonder.

She read it a second time.

"And you say that the party who brought this letter is waiting?" she then queried.

"Yes, madam."

"Show him in immediately."

The visitor entered a few moments later, with such a profound inclination that Mrs. Levison saw at first only the top of his head. After taking two or three steps he halted, still bowing, with his hat between his hands.

"Who are you?" demanded Mrs. Levison, with a mien as unladylike as her words.

"A friend," was the answer, as the visitor raised his head sufficiently to bestow a glance upon her.

"A friend of Mr. Brail, you mean, since such is the term he applies to you in his letter."

"And your friend also, madam," assured Decker, "although with your beauty and fortune you have no need of the friendship of any one."

"What is your business with me?"

"A very important affair—very."

"Then speak."

"I shall have to take a little time to it."

The mistress of the house indicated by a gesture a chair at some distance from her, and the visitor proceeded to install himself leisurely in it, placing his hat upon the floor beside him.

As brief as was the interval of time consumed in this proceeding, Mrs. Levison glanced for the third time at the letter.

"I see that Mr. Brail speaks of an important communication," she said.

The visitor nodded assent.

"He also speaks of his departure from town for several days. All that seems a little odd. I have just seen Mr. Brail, and he didn't breathe a word of this."

"That is because he didn't know anything himself about it at that moment," explained Decker. "Later, it struck him as prudent to disappear!"

"Prudent? Disappear?" repeated the Jewess.

"Yes, madam."

"Do you mean to say that he is in any way menaced?" demanded Mrs. Levison, beginning to show a marked inquietude.

"Not immediately or directly, madam—at least not more so than others!"

"Who do you mean by others?"

She straightened up suddenly, with her head thrust forward, and with a gleam in her eyes which seemed to speak of some interior commotion.

"What others?" she repeated nervously.

"Well, one who is dear to you!"

"I'd like to see that party," she sneered. "I don't know him!"

"I mean Doctor Wyville."

"The doctor!" more scornful than ever.

"And perhaps yourself, madam, by reason of the intimacy which has so long reigned between you and this illustrious physician!"

The Jewess flung her head back, with a deeper gleam in her eyes.

"Who has said to you anything of that kind?" she demanded.

"David has no secrets from me, madam."

"The idiot!" muttered the Jewess.

"Do not accuse him, madam. He is not to blame. We have been acquainted a long time, and have had a great many important transactions with each other. I gave him his first start in the world. It is to me that he owes his success, and consequently it is to me that you also, madam, are indebted for a portion of yours."

"You haven't given me the least idea yet who you are."

"My name is Solomon, madam."

"He has never spoken of you to me."

"Do you speak to him of all the people you visit or deal with?"

"Certainly not."

"Then how natural that he should have said nothing about me!"

The Jewess seemed irritated and impatient, rather than alarmed.

As quiet and humble as the visitor appeared, however, she realized that there was something menacing and dangerous about him, and this fact could not have failed to inspire her with a lively uneasiness and a keen curiosity.

The mere fact that he knew her and that she did not know him was enough to annoy her deeply.

Two or three times she had half-arisen in her chair, with a desire to order Rose to show the visitor to the door.

But she was too worldly wise and politic to give way to that temptation.

"Come, come," she said, after a short silence, and in a tone that almost seemed amiable, "I must ask you to explain. We cannot beat around the bush forever. Let me hear at once what you have to say."

Mr. Solomon arose slowly and moved his chair over two-thirds of the space separating him from Mrs. Levison, then resumed his seat, with another inclination which was equivalent to asking to be excused for the liberty he was taking.

"Are you sure no one can see us or hear us?" he whispered.

"Perfectly sure, sir."

"It would be dangerous to us all for what I am about to say to be overheard," pursued Solomon, with the air of settling down to his work. "The affair is an old one, since I am going back about twenty years, but it has certain ramifications which touch the present time and are as much alive as ever."

Mrs. Levison moved uneasily, but did not interrupt the speaker, who resumed:

"The hero of this affair—and when I say hero I merely mean the principal personage—is of course Doctor Wyville, but it is quite possible that you also, madam, may find yourself gravely compromised, from the fact that your relations to him date back to that period."

As he spoke, he brought a keen glance to bear upon the face of Mrs. Levison, and remarked that her inquietude had deepened perceptibly at these observations.

"It is perfectly true," she responded, "that my relations with Doctor Wyville have existed a score of years, and the fact is known to every one who knows anything about me. But be a little more explicit. Mr. Solomon, for I'm wholly at a loss to comprehend what you are driving at."

"At simply this, madam," pursued Decker. "The doctor had a brother, Mr. Claude Wyville, recently deceased, who married at that time, and you became his wife's chambermaid."

Mrs. Levison began to find these recollections unpleasant, and a perceptible diminution of color could have already been remarked upon her features.

"What you say is true," she responded. "Left an orphan soon after I came to America, I found myself stranded, after various driftings, in this city. The place in question was offered me, and I accepted it, remaining with Mrs. Wyville until her death."

"Mrs. Wyville," said Solomon, "was attended during that last, fatal illness by her brother-in-law, but for once his youth and inexperience seem to have told against him. At any rate, the lady died."

A tremor of agitation was perceptible in the frame of Mrs. Levison, and her pallor deepened.

"After her death," pursued Solomon, "the child, which had received the name of Julia, was handed over to the care of a nurse named Mrs. Birdsell. Is this correct?"

"Quite correct, but I am neither concerned nor interested."

"But wait a moment. At the end of a year Julia Wyville died—at least it was so reported. Are you quite sure, however, that Julia Wyville is dead?"

"What a question! Everybody knows it!"

"What you mean to say is: Everybody thinks so! Which is another thing altogether."

"I don't comprehend you," cried Mrs. Levison, with nervous impatience.

"Then I'll be more explicit."

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE JEWESS FORCED TO CONFESS.

THE Jewess suspended her respiration as Decker resumed:

"It now appears that Julia Wyville did not die. Another child, of Julia's age, had been placed in Mrs. Birdsell's keeping, and it was this latter child that died. A substitution of one child for the other was duly effected by the interested parties, through a cash transaction with the nurse, and Julia remained alive under the name of Pauline, while Pauline was buried as Julia."

Paleness was no longer the word to apply to the face of Mrs. Levison.

She had become livid.

For a few moments she essayed to stare her visitor out of countenance, and then she lowered her eyes.

"Let me say again," she declared, essaying in vain to control the agitation of her voice, "that I cannot imagine why you have come to me with this absurd story, since I am in no way mixed up with it. I left the house of Mr. Claude Wyville immediately after the death of his wife, and I don't know anything further about his affairs, except that I read of the death of his child in some local column."

"And if you hadn't read of it, you would have known it just the same, since the doctor could not have failed to tell you about it."

"That is more than I can remember—"

"But the fact is certain. It interested Doctor Wyville too deeply for him not to speak of it to the woman he adored. That pretended death opened to you and to him a better future."

"Not at all—"

"Permit me, madam, to insist upon this point also. Mr. Claude Wyville inherited a large fortune from his wife, and it was only natural for the doctor to look upon that fortune as the future heritage of himself and his daughter."

"Well, he slipped up handsomely in his calculations, if he had any," said Mrs. Levison, mockingly, "for the money has gone to a nephew, who became his son-in-law."

"Of course no one can foresee everything," observed Decker. "But to come back to Julia Wyville. Do you still declare to me that she is dead?"

"I simply tell you what everybody will tell you," answered Mrs. Levison, as an angry flush stole into her cheeks. "But again I must ask you what you are driving at? What is the use of talking to me at this hour about a lot of people of whom I know nothing, of a nurse whose very name is unknown to me, and of a Pauline of whom I did not so much as know the existence?"

"What! after coming in person to the baby-farm for her, and taking her away in your own carriage, and keeping her in your own house six months?"

The Jewess arose as if a clap of thunder had startled her.

Crossing the floor rapidly, she opened the

door and looked out into the hall, and then explored the adjoining room, with the evident intent of assuring herself that no one was within hearing.

Then she locked and bolted both doors, and came striding back to the visitor, with such a menacing air, with such staring eyes and compressed lips, and especially with such a scared and desperate face, that almost any other man than Inspector Mortimer would have been afraid of her.

"Mr. Solomon," she said sternly, "this comedy has gone far enough. Who are you? What do you want here? Answer, and look well to what you are doing. I hate as intensely as I love, and woe to you if you have come here to provoke me to anger! Remember that I am in my own house, and take notice that you will not leave it until you have explained yourself fully and given me the secret of this odious interrogatory!"

Solomon showed that he was no more disturbed by the woman's menacing attitude than he would have been by the gentlest zephyrs passing over him.

"Calm yourself, dear madam," he said gently, "calm yourself! If I were not a friend, it would be easy for me to draw the gravest deductions from your agitation, and especially from the falsehood you have told me in saying that you know nothing of that Pauline who has such a very lively recollection—the poor girl—of your peculiar system of education!"

"Ah, it is the girl herself who has begun talking?"

"The girl and others!"

"Others? Impossible!"

"I name especially Doctor Wyville."

"He!" gasped the Jewess, recoiling.

Then a smile of conscious strength gathered upon her lips.

"You are lying!" she declared. "The doctor never has said anything, and he never will!"

She seated herself in front of the visitor, and continued:

"You have not yet responded to my questions, Mr. Solomon. I want to know why you are raking up this dead past?"

"Excuse me, madam," said Decker, "but what you call 'this dead past' is only too living. I have no hesitation in saying to you that I have found that Julia Wyville you have so long claimed to have died, and I am equally sure that she is the daughter of Claude Wyville and the legitimate heiress at this moment of every dollar her father left behind him."

"Well, what have I to do with all that?" demanded the Jewess. "I cannot say that you are mistaken, for I know nothing about the matter. The only one who can possibly be involved in this business is Doctor Wyville. I do not see how I am in any way compromised, nor who can accuse me."

"Who? Doctor Wyville?"

"The doctor?"

"I've just left him. Cornered and realizing that he is lost, he throws all the blame upon you, and swears that he has acted only upon your advice and direction, and that you are the instigator. In a word, he says that you are the principal offender, and that he is merely an accomplice, who has acted without due reflection."

"The miserable villain!" cried the Jewess, bounding to her feet. "He says that, does he?"

Decker looked away a moment, that she might not see how joyfully his eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

He had stirred her up even more effectually than he had hoped.

"The reptile!" she exclaimed. "He dares to say that, does he?"

"He not only says it, but he declares he will prove it if he is pushed to the wall."

"The villain lies! He'll never be able to prove it—never!"

"That I can well believe, madam. But he's a capable rascal, we must all agree, and he knows how to turn even the smallest details to account."

"What details?"

"Even the most innocent. For instance, he will say that he became acquainted with you when you were in the service of his sister-in-law, and that ever since then he has been guided by you."

"What would that prove? Can't you be acquainted with a man without knowing anything about his crimes or taking any part in them?"

"Then he will say that he has been obliged to commit these crimes in order to appease your insatiable demands for money."

"The old story!"

"He will say that you knew how necessary it was for him to inherit from his brother, and that you incited him to the crime in order to reap the benefits of it."

"He'll only have his statement to show for it."

"He will say that you are the principal in the substitution of the children, and he will prove it by pointing to the fact that the very day after Mrs. Birdsell received ten thousand dollars as the price of her silence—"

The Jewess sunk tremblingly into a chair.

"The very next day even, you came in your

carriage to take charge of the pretended orphan."

"Ah, he'll say that—he'll dare say it, will he?" cried the Jewess, with a countenance convulsed with wrath.

"He will relate the scene where you gave the poor child such an awful beating, at the same time exclaiming: 'I wish her father could see us at this moment!'"

The Jewess dug her nails into the silken arms of her chair, as if to keep herself from falling, and a white froth appeared on her lips.

"Enough!" she gasped. "Enough!"

"I'll say no more now, madam. All I wanted to do was to give you an idea of the accusations you may expect from Doctor Wyville, when you are both brought before judge and jury."

This final shot completed the effect of all which had preceded it.

The Jewess stared at him as if annihilated.

"Do—do you mean to say that I am to be arrested, Mr. Solomon?" she asked.

Decker nodded.

"But upon what charges?"

"Half a dozen or more, such as sequestration of a minor, conspiracy to rob Julia Wyville of her inheritance, the substitution of which I have spoken, and what not. The complaint has been made, and the investigation has been entered upon. I am sorry I didn't see you sooner. But it's too late."

"Not at all," assured the Jewess, rousing herself. "That miscreant will not dare face me with any such story. I can talk also, Mr. Solomon! I can tell a thing or two! I can be an accuser! It confounds me utterly to hear that he dares to open his mouth, since he must be aware that I have only to speak to bury him forever in a bottomless pit!"

"He has only spoken to me, thus far," said Decker insinuatingly, "and I can readily find means of controlling him, so that the matter will go no further, if you will put it in my power to prove unmistakably that the Pauline Munson of to-day is really and truly the Julia Wyville of Mrs. Birdsell's baby-farm!"

The tone of Solomon attested at this moment that he was perfectly sincere in making this offer, and the Jewess comprehended that what she now had under her hand was a compromise.

If she could annihilate the doctor, she could secure her own salvation.

She did not hesitate as long as she could have held her hand in boiling water.

"Oh, I'll fix him!" she declared, with the energy of desperation, as her bold, black eyes settled upon her visitor. "Since he has dared to speak against me, let him pay the penalty! Listen!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DR. WYVILLE'S PAST.

THE inspector bent nearer, suppressing an involuntary gleam of satisfaction.

"Since the doctor has been mean enough to accuse me," pursued the Jewess, pale with wrath, and inflamed with venom, "I'll give you his pedigree. Need I say that I have always hated and despised him, and that the only reason I had for maintaining relations with him was to 'bleed' him? I have never had, and never expect to have, the least remorse for making his financial path so thorny, for a good share of the money I have exacted from him has been stolen, and the rest—"

She bent her head nearer, lowering her voice to a barely audible whisper:

"The rest is stained with blood!"

The inspector remained as calm as if he had expected this revelation.

"And in *what* blood?" added the Jewess, with a shudder. "I do not believe a man ever committed a murder under more cowardly and horrible circumstances!"

"He killed his sister-in-law, Mrs. Claude Wyville, didn't he?" asked Solomon, in a tone as low as that of his companion.

"He did!"

"While attending her?"

"Yes. Who told you?"

"No one. It is sufficiently indicated by the circumstances. But why didn't you reveal the fact on the instant?"

"I—I hated his brother!"

The inspector looked at the speaker with a new and startling interest.

"Was he such a man as the doctor?"

"The very contrary. The contrary in everything. Handsome of person and noble-minded."

"But why did you hate him?"

The Jewess hesitated.

"I comprehend," pursued Decker. "The old man Solomon has seen so much of this sort of thing that you need have no false shame about avowing the facts. You hoped at one time to secure the hand of Claude Wyville, and you failed?"

"Yes, that's it!"

"But did the doctor hate Claude?"

"Yes, with the fury of a demon. To begin with, he hated his brother because Claude seemed to have received from Nature all those gifts of person and mind he himself lacked. Then there were questions of property and inheritance dat-

ing far back. But the greatest cause of the doctor's hatred against his brother was the fact that Claude had married the girl the doctor wanted!"

"I see!" breathed Solomon. "They were rivals in everything, even in love! And Claude knew nothing of his brother's bitterness and malice toward him?"

"No, for the reason that the doctor is a still one—a biter and not a barker! A hypocrite, too, a consummate actor, who knew how to hide his envy and jealousy, and assume such a fair exterior as to deceive his brother completely."

"And that is how the doctor came to be present at Julia's birth?"

The Jewess assented.

"You had then been in the service of Mrs. Claude Wyville several months?"

"Between six and seven. It didn't take me long to understand the hatred of the doctor for his brother and his love for his sister-in-law. The doctor had married, in his turn, to be sure, but only as a matter of business and convenience. I was present at the moment he gave the fatal dose, under the pretense of administering a strengthening tonic. The stuff was so abominable, and it caused such instant distress, that the patient uttered a terrible cry. The doctor turned, and saw that I had surprised his secret, but it was too late. Mrs. Wyville lay as one dead, although possibly only in a swoon. He stepped toward me, with a menacing gesture."

"A word," he whispered, "and I will kill you!" I recoiled in horror. "If you keep my secret," he added, "I'll give you half I've got, and half that will come to me some day from Claude. Besides, you are now revenged upon him." Still retreating before him, I had reached the door, and I opened it and fled to my room, where I fell into a swoon which lasted for hours. When I recovered my senses, night had come. A silence like that of death reigned in the house. The terrible scene of which I had been a witness haunted me. What should I do? I was about to go and tell all when it occurred to me that the dose might not be fatal. While tossing on my bed and hesitating, I fell asleep from exhaustion, and knew nothing more until morning!"

The inspector inclined his head with the air of one who has comprehended, but he did not speak.

The Jewess sighed, and continued:

"My first thought on awakening was also a decision. I resolved to act. But ere I reached the door the doctor appeared. Never shall I forget how he looked. Ten years seemed to have passed over his head during that night. There was something so terrible and menacing about him, as he regarded me, that I was tempted to call for help."

"Esther," he said, "you have said nothing, and so much the better for you!"

"There is still time to speak!"

"No, Esther. It's too late!"

"She is dead?"

"Yes."

"I knew as much. I had read the truth in his eyes at the moment he appeared."

"Well," I said, "that will not prevent me from telling what I know!"

"He came nearer, and took me by the hand, in a grasp that chilled me, and said:

"It's too late for you to say a word—too late for you, I mean. Yesterday, if you had spoken, a mere hint would have been fatal to me. Today, all you can say, will only recoil upon yourself. This long night's silence makes you my accomplice!"

"He saw that I was terrified, and he followed up his advantage, inflaming skillfully the passion I had long had for his brother, and saying that Claude would be the first to curse me for any revelations which came too late to be of any use to the victim."

"But why did you do such an abominable thing?" I demanded.

"Then he confessed that he had lost his head one day in Mrs. Claude Wyville's presence, carried away by her matchless beauty, and that he had fallen upon his knees, seizing her hand, and had implored her to fly with him. The scorn he had received on that occasion had turned his love to the sourest hate. He feared also that the wife would report his conduct to her husband. All these passions and fears, with his greed of gold, had led him to the commission of the crime."

"I realized that it was too late to denounce him," resumed Mrs. Levison, "but I was at once needy and ambitious, as well as capable and determined, and it was not long before I began turning my knowledge to account. The day finally came when I forced the doctor to give me a written confession of his crime, as the price of my friendship and silence."

"And he gave you such a document?" asked the inspector, in undisguised astonishment.

"He did."

"And you still have it?"

"Yes."

"But not at hand at this moment?"

"Certainly not. He has too often regretted his folly in giving it to me. In a moment of regret and good-sense, he would not have hesitated to give me a 'dose' in order to recover

possession of the document which made him my slave."

"Then where is it?"

"It is with my lawyer, who also has charge of my will and a portion of my money and bonds," explained the Jewess, arising. "In regard to all these matters, Mr. Solomon, I have told you the exact truth. I had no share in that horrible murder, either in word or deed. I had no knowledge that such a crime was contemplated. I would have prevented it if I could. My only complicity has been my silence, not out of pity for the criminal, but through those passions and motives to which I have merely alluded, and which you will not have the least difficulty in comprehending."

She took a turn or two across the room, and then came back to the visitor, extending her plump, white hands toward him.

"There is no blood upon these hands," she declared, "and it will be useless for Doctor Wyville to accuse me. Moreover, after what I have said to you, you will have no difficulty in convincing him that, if he ever says a word against me to any human being, he will regret it. I shall not merely accuse him, but I shall hurl him to a speedy and ignominious doom!"

"Oh, you may regard him as powerless to harm you from this moment," assured the inspector. "Is Mr. Brail aware of this terrible secret in the doctor's life?"

"Neither David nor any one else," replied Mrs. Levison. "I have never before opened my mouth on the subject to any one, and I should not have done so now, except as a response to the cowardly attempts of that man to render me responsible for his wickedness. It's needless to add that all I have said to you, Mr. Solomon, has been said in confidence."

"Quite right, madam. And now for the facts concerning Claude Wyville's daughter."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PROOFS CONCERNING PAULINE.

MRS. LEVISON did not respond immediately to her visitor.

She was not only weary with the excitement of the preceding hour, but she experienced a sort of regret at realizing that her well-guarded secret of twenty years was now in the keeping of another.

"I understand just how you feel about these matters, Mrs. Levison," pursued Decker, insinuatingly. "But the best way to protect yourself against the doctor—who is sure to make desperate accusations against you, sooner or later—is to arm me as thoroughly as you can against him. Miss Wyville is bound to have her name and rights again, and I count upon your aid to that effect, as the very least you can do toward righting a great wrong in which you have been implicated."

"How she must hate me!" exclaimed the Jewess, as she resumed her seat.

"Not necessarily, as you will realize if you will look more closely into the subject," returned the visitor. "In the first place, she was too young in those early days to have a full conception of the wrong that was being done her. Then, too, it is her uncle, and not you, to whom the great burden of this guilt must be ascribed. And, finally, even if she has ample reason to be dissatisfied with your conduct in the past, how easy it is for you to make amends in the future! Let me beg of you, therefore, to go on in the good path you have entered upon, and assist me in restoring this charming girl to her true name and place."

"So be it, Mr. Solomon," exclaimed the Jewess, with a sigh. "It's easy to comprehend that I have said too much to you already to hesitate at these last details."

"I thank you sincerely, madam, in her name," said Decker. "Go on."

"Yes, the girl you know as Pauline Munson," avowed the Jewess, "is really the only child and heiress of the late Claude Wyville. The idea of the substitution in question was not definitely decided upon until the death of the other little girl at the baby-farm of Mrs. Birdsell. This nurse had formerly been in the service of the Wyvilles, and that is why Claude intrusted his child to her, and all the more naturally because he himself was almost insane for months after the loss of his wife, so terribly did he feel her death."

"The price paid Mrs. Birdsell for her consent to the substitution was what I have already stated, ten thousand dollars."

"It was. But who told you the exact figures?"

"Miss Pauline herself. Coming and going, she caught some snatches of the conversation between the nurse and the doctor on that day when the agreement was reached, and these figures remained engraven in her memory, as she has recently told me. But why didn't you keep Pauline with you?"

"For several reasons which appeared to me decisive at the moment," answered Mrs. Levison, frankly. "In the first place, I do not like children, and I disliked *his* child above all others. A further reason was that I shrunk from mixing up so prominently in that matter. But my principal motive was that her uncle, in a fit of remorse, seeing how much she resembled his

daughter, appeared capable of committing some folly."

"What kind of folly?"

"Why, he spoke of giving her an education, and looking after her future."

"Really? You astonish me."

"I accordingly bound her out to a dressmaker, and he has not seen her since."

"And you?"

"Nor have I. I knew the less I had to do with her the better."

"The doctor has never made any attempt to find her or learn what had become of her?"

"Not the slightest."

"Strange! strange!"

For a moment the inspector was silent, wondering at the singular manner in which the wronged child had been thrust into the path of the evil-doer, if, as was already probable, the doctor had encountered her on his visit to New York to kill his nephew.

"And now for the address of the nurse, Mrs. Birdsell," he said, abruptly.

Mrs. Levison regarded him fixedly.

"If I give it to you," she said, "will it be safe? Will you see that Pauline does not talk against me, or call me to account or make me any trouble?"

"Rest easy about that, madam," assured Solomon. "She will make you no trouble whatever."

The address was accordingly written out upon a scrap of paper, which the visitor secured in his pocket-book.

"So far, good," commented Solomon, as he arose, for the first time since the commencement of the interview. "I thank you sincerely."

He arose so tall and straight, in fact, and with such dignity, that Mrs. Levison realized that there was something more under that poor garb and that gray beard than she had supposed.

"The services you have rendered me, Mrs. Levison," he continued, in his natural voice, "are too important for me to make any bad use of them against you. But I may now tell you that I am not a Jew, and that my name is not Solomon, but these assumptions are merely a part of the machinery I have called into use in order to call a terrible villain to account."

"Who are you?" demanded the Jewess, recoiling, in sudden consternation.

"I am Inspector Mortimer, of the police force of this city," replied the visitor, as he laid his card upon the corner of the table beside which the Jewess was standing.

"But the letter from Brail—"

"Oh, it's quite authentic."

For a moment Mrs. Levison was inclined to be angry.

"What a trick to play upon me!" she murmured.

"In some respects—yes," acknowledged the inspector, with a smile. "But even as you do not hesitate to use any ruse, or even falsehood, in order to render your war on society a success, so do we not hesitate to masquerade a little when masquerading seems best calculated to carry our point. With us, as with you, all means of arriving at the desired ends are good."

"Well, I'll forgive you, inspector, if you will protect me from the doctor," said Mrs. Levison, after a pause, as she offered her hand. "Worry him all you please, but do not make any 'bad use' of what I have this night told you."

"To this understanding I must put a condition, however," returned the inspector, "and that is that you do not say a word to Doctor Wyville on the subject of this visit, and that you do not communicate with him by writing in regard to it."

"Oh, I pledge you my word to that effect," was the response, as the Jewess unlocked the doors of the apartment. "I shall never so much as say to any human being that I have had the honor of this visit!"

"Then all is understood between us," said the inspector, as he picked up his hat and moved toward the door. "Let us both be discreet!"

And with this he bowed and took his departure.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PAULINE'S REJOICE.

A COUPLE of days later, toward nine o'clock in the evening, Mr. Joseph Decker came back to his lodgings over the office of Dr. Wyville, and found himself face to face with Harry Fountain.

With what joy, with what positive relief even, the young man welcomed his protector, will be readily imagined.

"How are things here?" asked the latter, after exchanging a hearty clasp of the hand with the accused.

"About as you left them, sir."

"You hear nothing definite, then, from our new chambermaid, in regard to the identities of the doctor and his son-in-law?"

"Not yet."

"Haven't you seen her?"

"A few minutes only last evening. But she had nothing to say of a very positive nature. She was very much agitated, and has left me in such a state of mind that I have been on live coals all day."

"That means that she is on track of something. When shall we see her again?"

"She said she'd look in upon us some time this evening, so that we may expect her from one moment to another."

"And Mr. Brail? How have you got along with him?"

"Oh, in perfect peace and harmony."

"Where is he?"

"In his bedroom, absorbed in a book you had here on your shelf."

"Has he chafed any at being cooped up here in my absence?"

"Not in the least, sir. I think he is rather pleased at being 'cooped up' at just this moment. He doubtless realizes that what may happen is far more to be feared than what has actually taken place. And you, sir?" added Harry, after a moment's hesitation. "Have you been successful? Have you found what you were seeking, and learned what you wanted to know?"

"Yes, I've learned and I've found," answered Decker, laconically.

"What joy!" cried Harry. "You cannot imagine how impatient I have been to see you, the missions you so boldly enter upon seem so full of danger. And then I feel myself so powerless and helpless, so solitary and abandoned, when you are no longer here to inspire me with hope and patience!"

"Well, here I am," breathed Decker, contentedly, as he planted himself in an easy-chair before a cheerful fire that was burning in the grate. "I'm here to stay, too. But I must see Pauline before anything further can be said or done."

At this moment a timid ring was heard at the private door of the inspector's suite of apartments.

"There she is!" breathed Harry.

"Let her in," ordered the inspector.

Harry was absent longer than was absolutely necessary to give the girl admittance, but the couple soon appeared.

At sight of Mr. Decker, she advanced to greet him, with the air of being greatly comforted by his presence.

He shook her hand heartily, and then held her at arm's length from him.

"Oh, what a pair of bright eyes to tell me that you have many things to reveal!" he ejaculated.

"Such is indeed the case, sir!"

Her lovely face became clouded suddenly, and the paleness which usually accompanies a profound emotion appeared on her visage.

"Now for it," exclaimed Harry, with caressing glances, as he advanced a chair for the girl's use. "Yesterday, it was of no use to appeal to you. You would hardly say a word to me."

"Yesterday," answered Pauline, gently, as she seated herself, regarding Harry with glances expressive of infinite tenderness, "I was not as sure of one or two points as I wanted to be. Yesterday I was afraid of speaking too soon, and of giving you a hope which could not be realized, and which must end sooner or later in disappointment. But to-day, Harry—"

She caught his hand and drew him nearer, her eyes glowing like stars.

"To-day it is different! To-day I am certain! To-day I can declare: I now know the real assassin. I can prove his guilt and at the same time prove your innocence!"

"Is it possible, Pauline?"

Pale and trembling, Harry seated himself at the girl's feet, looking into her face as if she were the oracle of his destiny.

"It is true, then?" he muttered. "At last I can lift up my head again in the midst of my fellow-beings? At last this hunt for me will be suspended? At last the truth concerning me is in a fair way to become known to the world? And for this I have to thank your courage and devotion! Let the day which brought us together be blessed forever!"

Pauline sighed, and declared:

"I am glad, Harry, to have your good name and happiness as the objective points of my task, for I should never be able to go on to the end, if only myself were concerned—never!"

"Why not?" asked Decker.

"Because we are not striking a demon alone—possibly two of them—but also an angel!"

"You mean the doctor's daughter?" pursued the inspector.

"Yes, sir."

"But what we are doing will also deliver her, in so far as she needs to be freed from that precious pair," said Decker. "But let us proceed, Pauline, to take cognizance of your discoveries."

He drew up a chair and sat down beside the young couple, resuming:

"You have seen the husband and the father?"

"I have."

"Which of them first?"

"The husband."

"And you recognized him? He is really Percy Wyville?"

"I thought so the first time I saw him. His age, his features, his build—in fact, all his characteristics—seemed those of Percy Wyville. But every subsequent view of him has modified that first impression. The air and expression, the

frank and open countenance, that joyful expansiveness I remarked in Percy Wyville—that is all absent. The voice, too, is different, and then this man is so preoccupied, so taciturn and gloomy! In a word, the husband of the doctor's daughter is not Percy Wyville!"

The inspector smiled approvingly.

"That's just the way I knew it would turn out," he said. "Did the husband recognize you as the messenger who took the letter to the hotel in New York?"

"Not at all."

"Didn't he even look at you as if he had seen you before?"

"No, sir."

"Did nothing in your voice, features, or appearance attract his notice?"

"Not in the least."

The inspector smiled significantly, rubbing his hands together contentedly.

"That tells the story," he declared. "The man of whom we are speaking is not the real Percy Wyville!"

"But there is a certain resemblance—"

"Exactly, my dear child. The resemblance of Percy Wyville and Hubert Garson has been established beyond all question. In other terms, the husband of the doctor's daughter is Hubert Garson!"

"But," insisted Pauline—

"We'll come back to him, later," interrupted Decker. "Just now I want to hear what you have to say about the doctor!"

"Oh, as to him," replied Pauline, with a shudder of horror, "that is a different matter! In regard to him I hadn't a doubt or a moment's hesitation!"

"You recognized him?"

"At the first glance! And what is more, he recognized me!"

The inspector smiled, while Harry flushed with a wild joy.

"But he had dark hair and a black beard when you saw him, Pauline!" observed Decker.

"They were merely put on for the occasion! All the wigs and false beards in the world could not hide his eyes, his manner, his voice, his abrupt movements, his nervous glance! Oh, I can swear to his identity before all the judges in the world. Doctor Wyville is the man who gave me alms that night in New York, who gave me a letter which I delivered to Percy Wyville at the latter's hotel, and who gave me money to return to Philadelphia and for the service I rendered him—about fifteen dollars altogether!"

"And he recognized you, you said?"

"Oh, I shall never forget that moment—never!" murmured Pauline, trembling at the very recollection of the scene she had traversed. "How he started! What a look of terror crept over his face and stared from his eyes! He recoiled two or three steps, tottering with each as if about to fall, and carrying his hand to his eyes and forehead as if asking himself if he were not the sport of some dreadful hallucination! He couldn't have been more horrified if he had seen the ghost of his victim!"

The features of Inspector Mortimer glowed with a stern joy.

"You see, therefore, Mr. Fountain," he said, in a voice that vibrated with the keenest satisfaction, "that the real author of the Weehawken murder has been discovered, and that you are saved!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE SITUATION BRIGHTENING.

THE joy and relief these words gave Harry, after the terrible experience he had passed through since the reception of the thousand-dollar greenback, seemed to revolutionize his whole being.

"How much I am indebted to you, Inspector Mortimer!" he cried, with a hearty clasp of the hand. "And especially to Pauline!"

"Yes, especially to Pauline," declared the inspector, with a keen satisfaction. "I have merely done my duty in the regular way of business, and with more or less good sense and energy, but she has shown that devotion which comes so naturally to a woman when the one she loves is in danger. She has not hesitated a moment to face a great and positive peril for the sake of clearing your good name from the shadow which has been cast upon it. She has given her every thought to this task so entirely that she don't even think of asking me how I've got on with the inquiries I have been making on her account."

"But I think of it," cried Harry, "and I have already interrogated you in regard to the matter—only you have not yet answered."

"Oh, there is always time enough to answer when the news is bad," said the inspector, as he turned away, with a foxy look in his eyes.

"Bad news?" faltered Pauline.

"So far as you are concerned—yes, my child," returned the inspector. "I am sorry now that I did not speak of your hopes and prospects with more reserve. It is always a great mistake to arouse hopes which are doomed to perish."

"Can the case be so bad as that?" queried Harry. "It certainly seemed to me as if your conjectures and suspicions had an assured basis."

"I cannot pretend to the contrary."

"For my part," pursued Harry, "I cannot doubt for a moment that Pauline is the daughter of Claude Wyville."

"That is also my conviction."

"Well, then—"

"But our convictions, even our certitude, would neither prove anything, nor lead to any result."

"Indeed? I supposed you were seeking the proofs—"

"To be sure, that's what I have been doing, but between seeking and finding there is often a wide margin."

"The nurse, Mrs. Birdsell—"

"Oh, she's still alive, and I have even seen her. Nothing less than her testimony would suffice to establish the substitution of one child for the other, but not a word can be got out of her. She denies everything, despite all my pleadings and threats, and despite liberal offers of money. She will continue this line of conduct to the end."

He turned to Pauline and added:

"From all this, my child, you will realize that there is no hope for us, and it is needless to say that I am cruelly disappointed."

Pale and silent, Pauline had listened with deep and painful emotion, but she hastened to reply:

"As I have never really counted upon any success in the direction indicated, I shall not worry myself in the least about the miscarriage of our expectations. I am not particularly ambitious. What does it matter? Mr. Fountain is saved, and that is the essential."

"Well, I shall fret quite as little as you do," declared Harry. "Our happiness, thank Heaven, does not depend upon any such externals!"

Pauline regarded him with a keen air of inquiry, and with a profound emotion.

"Yes," he resumed, "I am not at all inclined to regret the turn affairs have taken, since I am now able to say, Pauline, I have loved you ever since the first moment of our acquaintance. Hunted, accused and dishonored, I could not have avowed my love. If you were Julia Wyville, the heiress of a fortune, and recognized as such by all the world, the gulf between us would be so great that I should never dare attempt to cross it. As it is, Pauline—"

He knelt at her feet, taking her hand, with a face eloquent with respect and affection, and continued:

"As it is, Pauline, I dare to hope. Loving and beloved, I shall be able to make my way. We can be happy without a grand name or a fortune. Darling, will you be my wife?"

Tears of gladness were at first the only response Pauline had to offer.

"Ah, you accept me!" added Harry, covering the hands he held with kisses.

"I—I hardly know if I ought to listen to my heart," she faltered. "It's so hard, dear Harry, to come to you without name or fortune, when I wanted so much to come to you with both!"

"But you love me, darling Pauline?"

"Better than I love my own soul!"

"Then what more do we want?" and Harry caught her to his breast. "With love and hope, we have the essential."

"I think so, too," murmured Pauline, as she threw her arms around him. "At any rate, we'll try it!"

The inspector dashed a sympathetic tear from each eye, and advanced nearer.

"I am very much delighted at this little episode of real life," he said. "You've done the right thing at the right time, Mr. Fountain, and so have you, Miss Pauline. It was because I expected this state of things a little, and because I hoped for it strongly, that I have taken the liberty of—well, of pretending to have bad news. I've been joking!"

"Joking!" echoed the lovers in chorus.

"I can't hardly say *lying*, for I had no intention of deceiving you, but the truth is the contrary of what I have pretended."

He took Pauline by the hand, and bent nearer, pressing a fatherly kiss upon her forehead.

"Permit me, MISS JULIA WYVILLE," he said, "to be the first to salute you by your real name, and by the one of which you are now in perfectly assured possession."

"What!" cried the maiden, starting to her feet, in wild excitement. "What do you mean?"

"That my guest of the last few days has responded fully to my hopes and wishes. I have not only seen Mrs. Birdsell, the nurse, but she has made a sworn affidavit of the facts, which precious document I have in my pocket-book, in readiness for use at the right moment, and she is ready to come forward in person with the same declarations at any time she may be called upon to do so."

"And she swears that I am Julia Wyville?"

"She does, my child!"

"The child of Claude Wyville?"

"Yes, in the plainest of terms. She gives the whole history of the substitution in her affidavit."

"So that there is no mistake about it, and no trouble in proving it?"

"Not the least, Julia. Not a single straw can be laid in the way of your legal recognition as the daughter of Claude Wyville, and as the heiress of the fortune he left behind him!"

The heiress turned to Harry again, with exclamations of fondest delight, throwing herself into his arms.

"Oh, joy! joy!" she murmured. "Now, I can accept you, darling! Now I can be your own little wife!"

"It's hardly necessary to add," continued the inspector, when the first joyous transports of the lovers were over, "that the will of Claude Wyville, which gave his fortune to a nephew, is now of no more account than so much blank paper. It having been made in ignorance of the existence of the natural and legal heiress, that will cannot fail to be invalidated at sight by the court having jurisdiction in the matter, and Miss Julia will soon be placed in possession of her rightful name and inheritance."

We need not dwell upon the joy with which the lovers heard these declarations—Julia, on Harry's account, and Harry on account of Julia. This long night was ending forever.

"And now to come back to the work devolving upon us," resumed the inspector. "The good seed has been sown, and now we must reap our harvest."

The couple aroused themselves on the instant.

"What is the next step to take?" asked Julia.

"The next step is to arrange for the doctor's arrest," replied the inspector. "By this time he must be in a state of mortal terror. All sorts of desperate schemes are doubtless passing in his mind, but we must not give him time to reach any decision."

"Of course Julia cannot return to her pretended service—"

"Oh, yes—she must!" interrupted the inspector. "If she should fail to be visible in the morning, the fact would betray us, and the guilty parties might make their escape, as I must have a portion of to-morrow to make my arrangements for the final movement of our game."

"I will return," said Julia, with an air of resolution.

"That is as it should be," said the inspector.

"I knew I could depend upon you. And of course, Mr. Fountain," he added, turning to Harry, "I will be responsible for this dear one until the hour of her vindication—and of yours. One more embrace," he added, with the fatherly air he liked so well to assume, "and then we must separate for the night."

CHAPTER XL.

THE COUSINS.

It was in vain that Julia Wyville wooed slumber during the long night that ensued.

If the thought of Harry and her own happiness had not sufficed to keep her awake, she would have found ample cause for sleeplessness in the sad reflections crowding upon her in regard to her cousin—to Nora.

As brief as had been her acquaintance with the wife of the false Percy Wyville, Julia had learned to respect her, and had even conceived a strong attachment for her.

It is easy to comprehend, therefore, the pain and regret with which Julia looked forward to the fatal moment when Nora would be enlightened in regard to the situation of her father and husband.

How grateful she was to the inspector for all he had done for her, and how kindly she felt toward him, need not be stated.

But now that she knew herself to be Nora's cousin, was it not her first duty, as owing to the memory of her father and herself, and also a respect she owed her newly-acquired name, to do all she could to soften the blow about to fall upon Nora, even to the extent of saving the guilty doctor from the shame and dishonor about to fall upon him?

The cruel problem thus presented was considered in all its bearings during that long night, and when morning came Julia had reached a decision.

She would at least tell her cousin of the terrible blow about to fall upon her, whatever might be the consequences of these revelations.

With the first gleam of day she was astir, busying herself with the duties of the role she had undertaken, but she had hardly drawn up the shades of the parlor and sitting-room, when Nora made her appearance, looking pale and unrestful, as if some instinct had told her of the coming trouble.

The false Percy Wyville appeared almost simultaneously with his wife, and it seemed to Julia that he, too, had borne his share of unrest during the night, for his face was gloomier than ever.

As soon as he had set out for his office—which event took place about half-past eight o'clock—Julia took her way to the presence of her cousin.

"I am not well this morning," remarked Nora, as she became conscious of the presence of her new chambermaid, "and I'll lie down awhile on the sofa. I will ring for you when I want you."

"I am sorry madam is suffering," returned Julia, with visible embarrassment. "Is there nothing I can do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you."

As Julia still remained, Nora bestowed a more searching glance upon her, readily detecting her agitation and nervousness.

"Is there something you wish to say to me?" she asked.

"Yes, madam, something of the utmost consequence, and which I cannot put off for even a moment!"

"Indeed? Something about yourself?"

"No, madam. Something that concerns you and all near and dear to you!"

The very tone of Julia was enough to have given the young wife a start.

She arose to a sitting posture abruptly, while her pallor deepened.

"In heaven's name, what's the trouble?" she demanded.

"One dear to you is in the gravest of peril!"

"My husband, do you mean?"

"No, your father."

"My father? Speak! What is the peril that menaces him?"

"Pardon me, madam, for the terrible pain I am about to cause you, but it is better for you to have the truth from me than from strangers."

"Speak! speak! I implore you!"

"In as few words, then, as possible: A gentleman connected with the police has been asking me questions about your father, and has stated that Doctor Wyville is accused of the murder committed between two and three months ago in Weehawken."

"My father accused of murder?" returned Nora, springing to her feet with every sign of indignation. "Impossible!"

"The charge has not only been made, madam," assured Julia, "but it appears that the police are possessed of the most convincing proofs!"

"Then all I can say is that there is some terrible mistake," declared Nora, calling all her forces to her aid. "Why did you not tell me of the presence of the accuser?"

"He would not have permitted me to do so, and what I say now is, of course, contrary to his wishes. But it seemed to me that I ought to tell you of these things, in order that you may take such measures as you see fit to conjure the peril which menaces your father. If he is innocent, as I hope, he may be able to accumulate proofs of the fact before he is arrested. If, unfortunately, he is guilty, he may at least be able to fly—"

"Oh, merciful heavens!" cried Nora, hiding her face in her hands and bursting into tears. "What a horrible situation in which to be placed! I can do nothing without my husband! Would that you had spoken before he started for the office! Some one must go in quest of him immediately!"

"I will see to that, madam," said Julia, moving toward the door.

"Hasten! hasten!"

As soon as Nora was left to herself, her pent-up feelings found relief in a terrible fit of weeping, at the end of which she sunk unconscious to the floor.

She was still unconscious when her husband made his appearance, but the attentions he gave her, with the aid of Julia, soon brought her back to a knowledge of her surroundings.

"Such a scare as you have given me, dearest," he cried. "I thought at first you were dead! But you are all right now? Tell me what has happened!"

"Oh, it's too dreadful for utterance, Percy," cried Nora, clinging to him as a drowning mariner clings to a plank. "But I must tell you!"

In a broken and sobbing voice, she hastened to communicate what she had learned from the new chambermaid. With every word from her lips, the trouble and anxiety of her husband became more and more marked, and a dismal groan was the only comment which escaped him when she had finished.

"You say nothing! You do not even protest, Percy!" cried Nora reproachfully, as she drew her form erect, and stared wonderingly at him. "One would think, to look at you, that you believe my father to be guilty!"

"And so I do, Nora!"

"Oh, hear him!" resumed the young wife, tearing herself from her husband's embrace. "What an avowal!"

The false Percy remained motionless, as wild of look as of eye, with the air of being at a loss what to say or do. But, at a new explosion of grief from Nora, he led her gently to the sofa where she had previously been seated, and gently placed her upon it.

"My darling, my adored one," he exclaimed, "a cruel hour has come! How glad I would be to believe in your father's innocence, is something I need not dwell upon, but I cannot—oh, I cannot!"

"You cannot! Oh, Percy! this is unworthy of you!" cried Nora, with an indignation almost as great as her sorrow.

"Hear me, my dear wife! I must tell you all. The horrible truth I have so long and so carefully kept from you must now be made known."

With this preamble, he proceeded to relate in a few rapid and broken sentences all that had befallen him since his departure from Philadelphia in a moment of despair at his inability to offer himself openly as a suitor for her hand.

When he reached that point of the narration which related to the murder in Weehawken, a cold sweat bedewed his forehead, and his whole frame shook with agitation.

"Oh, it's so hard to tell you of that horrible scene!" he panted.

"Go on, Percy," commanded Nora, with stony eyes and rigid face. "I must know all!"

The false Percy accordingly resumed his narration, advancing to the moment of the struggle he had had with the assassin, and of the glimpse he had caught of the assassin's features.

"And that man, you say, was—"

"Yes, Nora. When I had torn off his false beard and wig, I recognized the murderer as your father!"

"No! no! it's not true!" cried Nora, with wrathful reproach. "You are telling a falsehood—like all the rest! What possible motive could my father have had in killing this Hubert Garson?"

"It was not Hubert Garson who was killed but Percy Wyville!"

"Percy Wyville! Then who, in heaven's name, are you?"

"I am Hubert Garson!"

Nora buried her hands in her luxuriant tresses, uttering an awful cry of horror and despair.

It seemed for a moment as if she would go mad.

"You will comprehend, darling," resumed Hubert, as earnestly as hurriedly, "that I could do no less than take the place of the victim! To do this was not merely to save your father, but it was also to spare you the agony of knowing his guilt. I did not and could not hesitate a moment. If the actual identity of the victim had ever become known, your father would have instantly been suspected, for the simple reason that he had such a terrible interest in the death of his nephew."

He bent over his wife, caressing her tenderly, as he continued:

"I could not bear that the father of the pure and innocent girl I loved should be accused of such an abominable crime, and it was to spare you the shame of bearing a dishonored name that I took the course I did. You know the rest. Hubert Garson was said to be the murdered man, while, in reality, he presented himself to you and your father under the name of your poor cousin, and succeeded, with the aid of desperate lying to everybody, including you and the police, in becoming your husband. Can you pardon me for what I have done, and for what, I may even add, I was forced to do? Will you deem Hubert Garson worthy of the respect and affection you have bestowed upon Percy Wyville? Will you still love me, darling? Will you still be my own cherished wife?"

At these words, pronounced in such a loving and deprecating voice, as well as with such deep sorrow, Nora threw her arms around her husband's neck and kissed him again and again, while she sobbed:

"Oh, how good you are and have been! How I love you! If you were so dear to me when I did not know who you really were, how much more I shall love you now that I know who you are and how much I owe you?"

"A thousand thanks, my dear wife!" cried Hubert, raining kisses upon her. "How many times the declarations I have just made have trembled upon my lips! Oh, if I could only have seen my way to confession sooner, what agonies I might have been spared."

"And you can still love me, dear Hubert?" murmured Nora. "After the horrible crime you have witnessed, you can still love the daughter of the guilty man, and even live in the same house with him?"

"To be near you, darling," replied Hubert, "there is no torture I could not have endured. You now understand my attitude toward your father, of course, and can understand that coldness for which you have so often reproached me?"

"Oh, yes—yes!"

"Every time that I was forced to speak to him or give him my hand, before you or any one else," pursued Hubert, "it seemed to me that the real Percy must look with reproachful eyes upon my apparent ingratitude and treason, but a single glance from you was enough to bring peace back to my soul."

"And I had no suspicion of the terrible truth! And how happy I was!" exclaimed Nora, as a new flood of grief passed over her. "Oh, Hubert—"

"Not another word about ourselves, darling," interrupted the husband. "It's time to think about your father. I will do all I can to save him, if anything can be done. He has just returned I see from his morning calls. I will post him in regard to the situation, and we will advise as to the ways and means of getting out of it. Dry your eyes, darling, and try to compose yourself for the inevitable trials that are at hand. We have need now of all our coolness and courage."

"My father a murderer!" breathed Nora, clasping her hand to her heart. "Oh, I cannot see him! It would kill me!"

"There is not the least necessity of seeing him," returned Hubert. "Your agitation would at once tell him that his secret is known to you. Let me look after everything, and you remain quiet here, with the declaration that you are too ill to see any one—as you are! I will go now to your father, but I will return as soon as I have seen him. Perhaps all is not yet lost. Who knows?"

"Then go, Hubert!" and she caressed him with feverish earnestness. "Do not stay away too long, as every minute of your absence will be an eternity."

"I will do. I assure you, everything that is possible!"

"And I—during your absence—I will implore heaven to be merciful to the guilty one, and to assure us all some day the pardon of the victim!"

Hubert kissed her again, and with a face as solemn as death, he took his way to the doctor's office.

CHAPTER XLII.

A STRANGE FAREWELL.

WHEN Hubert Garson entered the presence of his father-in-law, the latter, seated at his desk was in the act of emptying its drawers, putting his papers in order, and burning in a grate all those he deemed worthless or dangerous, and especially all that related to his dealings with Mrs. Levison and David Brail.

The doctor was absorbed in this occupation to such an extent that he did not remark the presence of his son-in-law until the latter spoke to him.

"I beg your pardon, doctor," was Hubert's greeting, "but I have something very pressing and important to say to you."

Dr. Wyville noticed, as he turned his eyes upon the speaker, that he was singularly pale and agitated, and such a presentiment of calamity assailed him at this fact that a corresponding pallor appeared upon his own visage.

"I can hear what you have to say," he replied, suspending his labors, and keeping his eyes fixed upon some point of empty space, as if afraid of meeting the glance of his son-in-law.

"We're lost!" announced the false Percy, in a choking voice. "The real assassin of Percy Wyville is discovered, and may now expect from one minute to another the officers charged with his arrest!"

The doctor smiled as bitterly as despairingly, as he replied:

"I am aware of the fact."

"But how did you learn it?"

"An enemy has appeared in the house, in the person of that new chambermaid, who has taken Gertie's place, and she it is who has denounced me to the police. She it is, too, who has been charged by the police to keep an eye on me."

"Pauline, do you mean?"

"Yes, Pauline."

"Why, you must be mistaken. It is Pauline herself who has just told Nora of the peril by which you are menaced."

"Some new trap, no doubt. But I'm not to be deceived by it. That girl has recognized me, even as I have recognized her. She is the one who served as my messenger in New York, and who delivered to my nephew the letter which decoyed him to his doom. If you can comprehend that fact all further remarks will be unnecessary."

"Sure enough. In that case, we're lost beyond all redemption!"

"Did you come here with any doubt of that fact?"

"I at least hoped that you would have time to fly—"

"There's no use of thinking of flight for a moment," declared the doctor. "The presence of that girl in the house cuts off every chance in that direction. Besides, of what earthly use would flight be? It would merely cause the newspapers to teem again with the matter, and prolong it indefinitely. It is preferable to make an end of it immediately."

"But if you are arrested the police cannot fail to soon be in possession of my real identity. In that case, what means do I have of clearing myself? Poor Nora! To be so terribly stricken through both her father and her husband!"

"There's no necessity of whining about that, young man," assured the doctor. "I have thought of everything, especially of my daughter, and I have taken the necessary measures to conjure the evils by which you are menaced."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that I am duly conscious of the enormity of the crimes I have committed, and that I have long been judged and condemned in my own mind. Life has long been for me a torture, a constant and unutterable misery, especially since you forced your way into the house and became a member of my family, robbing me of the heart of my daughter, the only being in the world I have ever truly loved, and forcing me to live in your presence and to be a witness of your happiness—you, the living phantom of my victim—you, who have taken upon yourself his very name, even as you possess his very semblance, the better to recall to me at every glance I bestow upon you the hideous crime of which I have been guilty!"

"But, sir—"

"Oh, how I hate you! How I have suffered through you! What an incubus your presence has been! I have always seen in you, not a living man, but a ghostly avenger! I hate you with a hatred too absolute and awful for me to be able to express it! And if it were possible for me to kill you without plunging Nora into the lowest depths of despair—for she loves you

fondly—I should not hesitate any more about it than a hungry tiger hesitates to rend its victim!"

"I am aware that you hate me, doctor," returned Hubert, "but I have long loved Nora, and it was because of that love that I had pity upon her guilty father, and saved him from the hangman. What more could I do?"

"Nothing, it is true. Oh, how many times I have thought of committing suicide to deliver myself from the horrible remorse which assailed me and which the sight of you in the name and place of my nephew, sharpened to such intensity that I was nearly driven to madness. It is not because I am cowardly that I am still living. What has kept me alive has been the necessity of arranging my affairs in such shape as to leave as little shame and trouble to my child as possible at the moment of my departure. I also wished to adjourn her grief and distress as long as I could. But now that she knows all, and that the last plank between her and myself has been cut away beneath my feet, I need not wait until I am arrested to do myself justice. As to you, since you are the sole consolation of Nora, there is nothing for you to fear. I have made a written confession of my crime, in such terms as to exonerate you from all blame, and shall leave this confession in my desk. This said, I have nothing more to ask or require, except to beg you to leave me, as I would be alone! Adieu."

The doctor darted at Hubert a final glance charged with bitterness and hatred, and then, turning away, and ceasing to give a thought to his presence, he resumed, with feverish haste, the examination and assorting of his papers.

"Farewell, sir," returned Hubert, wiping away tears he had been unable to restrain, and with this he withdrew from the doctor's presence, not without a keen pity for him, and not without due respect for the firmness with which he was preparing to die.

CHAPTER XLIII.

UNINVITED VISITORS.

THE doctor's hours of consultation in the morning were from ten to twelve, as had long been announced upon a sign near the entrance of his office.

But this sign had now been taken in, and the clerical looking Tobias had been duly instructed to say to all visitors that the doctor himself was ill, and could not possibly receive any patient under any circumstances whatever.

Notwithstanding these facts, however, the clocks of the house and the neighborhood had exactly indicated ten o'clock, when three persons appeared at the door and asked to see the doctor.

"He's not in," declared Tobias.

"That's because he is doubtless expecting us," observed the foremost of the three visitors, who was no other than Inspector Mortimer, in his proper character. "His intention is to receive no one else, in order to spare us the annoyance of waiting. Be so good as to tell him that we are here."

"Who shall I announce?" asked Tobias, with the air of being considerably upset by the easy persistence of the inspector and the suspicious aspect of his two attendants.

"Inspector of Police Mortimer and a couple of his officials," was the answer.

With a start, which was succeeded by a look of pain and wonder, Tobias introduced the visitors into the reception-room, and then knocked at the door of the doctor's private office.

The door was promptly opened from within, the doctor looking out.

"Inspector of Police Mortimer," announced Tobias.

"Let the gentleman enter," was the answer.

The inspector began to avail himself of the invitation, leaving his two officers in the reception-room.

"I dare say your conscience has already told you why I am here, Doctor Wyville," said the inspector, as he seated himself in the chair the doctor had indicated by a gesture.

"It would be absurd to deny it," replied the doctor.

"Before I act in that matter, however," pursued Mortimer, "I propose to reveal to you a great many facts in your situation and surroundings of which you are innocent, but which concern you deeply."

The doctor assented with a slight inclination, but with an air of marked surprise, and not without a visible curiosity as to what was coming.

"Permit me to say, in the first place," resumed the inspector, "that I have had lodgings in your house for the past two months, or ever since you became an object of suspicion in connection with the Weehawken murder. I came here under the assumed name of Joseph Decker. I have had the suite of rooms immediately over your office, hiring them of your agent. By raising a board in my floor, I have heard a great many things which have thrown light upon your character and status."

The blood set swiftly into the doctor's face a few moments, and then receded, leaving him pale to ghastliness.

He ran his fingers nervously through his hair, and sighed.

"I am not surprised at what you tell me," he said. "For weeks past I have seen more goings and comings than I could explain or understand, and of late I have felt that my affairs were receiving a great deal of attention. It is to you, I suppose, sir, that I am indebted for that new chambermaid?"

"Yes, sir. Have you any idea who she really is?"

The doctor looked at his visitor in a scared sort of way, but shrunk from answering.

"I see!" said Mortimer. "You begin to understand who she is. She is not only the messenger who delivered a certain letter to Percy Wyville for you in New York, nine or ten weeks ago, but she is also your own niece."

The doctor raised his hands, as if to protect himself from a deadly blow.

"In a word," added the inspector, "she is Julia Wyville, the only child and heiress of the late Claude Wyville, the girl you maintained so long at the baby-farm of Mrs. Birdsell."

The doctor sat as if paralyzed.

Raising his voice, but without stirring from his seat, the inspector called:

"Come here, Julia!"

The door leading from the hall into the private office of the doctor was thrown open, and two figures appeared, arm-in-arm, upon the threshold.

They were Julia and Harry!

"Come in, my dear friends," invited the inspector. "Be seated!"

A gasping cry came from the doctor, but the words he would have uttered died away in his throat in an incoherent murmur.

"You know me, uncle?" asked Julia, with a pleasant smile, and with a look of pity in her radiant eyes, as she advanced toward him.

Oh, how well he knew her!

She had attired herself in a robe suited to her name and station, and was as lovely as an angel.

"Do you remember how I looked, uncle," she pursued, still advancing, "on that day when you arranged with Mrs. Birdsell to pay her ten thousand dollars for her consent to the substitution of the dead Pauline for me?"

"Yes, I remember!"

The guilty man did not dare deny it.

Halting near him, Julia looked back, extending her hand.

"Come here, Harry," she said.

Harry hastened to place himself by the maiden's side and take the fair hand offered him.

"Do you remember this man, uncle?" pursued Julia, bestowing upon her betrothed a look of loving admiration, which was in itself a sufficient announcement of the relations between them.

"Yes, I remember him!"

"Are you surprised to see him here?"

"No, child. Nothing can ever surprise me again, after I see how all my plottings have resulted!"

"Did you send him that thousand-dollar greenback for which he has been denounced and hunted?"

"I did! I did!"

"Did you rob him of his heritage?"

"Of what use to deny it, Julia? The truth is only too apparent upon the very face of things. I took advantage of his mother, and my only excuse is the financial torment in which I have been kept for years!"

"One word more, uncle! Would you like us to forgive you?"

The guilty man stared at the sweet face as if he could not believe his hearing.

"We are very happy, uncle—Harry and I," proceeded the girl, as Harry threw his arm protectingly around her. "All the wickedness you have thought to do has been overruled by the Great Hand which never errs. Mrs. Birdsell has made a sworn and written confession that I am the real Julia Wyville. The fortune my father left to my cousin is certain to come to me. Harry and I are engaged to be married. You see, therefore, that we can bear you no ill will, and we shall be glad to forgive you—if you are sorry and will never again seek to harm us!"

The doctor threw himself at their feet.

Such a burst of tears came from him as few men have ever shed.

"Oh, I deserve to be hanged!" he said, as soon as he could speak. "I am an awful, awful sinner!"

"Hello! who is that bellowing?" came in a cheery voice at this moment from the reception-room, as the door of communication was pushed ajar. "Curry me with a club, and send me to the heathen as a jewsharp, if it isn't Doctor Wyville himself!"

A hearty, rubicund figure came stalking into the presence of the doctor and those with him, looking around with an air of puzzled curiosity.

"Reuben Hanson!" cried the doctor, starting to his feet and staring at the new-comer.

"The same, doctor—that same lively old son of Neptune," answered Captain Hanson, with smiles as bright as the day. Give us your flipper, doctor, and then tell us what's the trouble."

The doctor held back.

"I am glad to see you, Reuben," he said, "but I cannot shake hands with you. I am not

worthy to do so. This hand is covered with blood."

"Who told you so?" roared Captain Reuben, not in the least cast down by the doctor's confession. "I am ready to lay great odds that you are mistaken. Ho, there, Mrs. Mawney."

The housekeeper made her appearance flushed and excited, but smiling.

"Do you know this woman, John?" asked Captain Reuben.

"Yes. She's my housekeeper. Do you know her?"

"Of course I do. She's my spy."

"Your spy?"

"Or female detective, whatever you choose to call her. Hey, there, Mr. Hartle!"

Mr. Hartle appeared promptly from the hall at this energetic demand for his presence.

"Do you know Mr. Hartle, John?" continued the captain.

"No. Never saw him before—"

"Well, he's another of my spies!"

"What do you mean, Captain Reuben?" demanded the doctor, clinging to the back of a chair for support.

"I mean that, when I heard of Claude's bequest, I was inspired with a lively fear that you'd do some cussedness, for I knew only too well how much you were harassed by those Jews. I also feared for the cash and for Percy, and Hetty feared for both even more than I did. And, what did I do? Why, I smuggled Mrs. Mawney and Mr. Hartle into your house—the one as a housekeeper and the other as a lodger—with orders to keep an eye on you constantly and keep me posted. When you left for New York, therefore, to kill Percy, under pretense of going to Washington, your real movements were reported to me by telegraph, so that, when you reached New York you were met by detectives in my employ—"

"You don't mean it!" gasped the doctor.

"I don't? Ho, there, Crummer!"

A little old man came bounding into the room—the same we alluded to, on several occasions, in the early pages of this narrative, as being engaged in watching the disguised doctor.

Nora and Hubert Garson came into the office immediately behind him, and ranged themselves near Harry and Julia, but without speaking and without receiving much attention.

"This little old man is named Crummer," resumed the old sea dog. "And now, Crummer, will you answer a few questions? Didn't you meet Doctor Wyville, here present, when he reached New York on the day he came to kill Percy?"

"I did, sir," answered Crummer.

"Didn't you follow him to the hotel?"

"I did, sir."

"And thence to Weehawken?"

"I've so stated, sir."

"And followed him and Percy to the cliff?"

"I am ready to swear to it, sir."

"And saw Percy killed?"

"No, sir," replied Crummer.

"And why didn't you see him killed?" pursued the jovial captain.

"Because he isn't dead, sir!"

"He isn't? Then it's high time for him to show up here and take part in these proceedings. Ho, there, Percy Wyville!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

CONCLUSION.

At the captain's stentorian call, the door leading from the reception-room was thrown widely open, and two figures appeared in the doorway.

They were the beau ideal of a newly-wedded pair, save that the groom was a little pale and thin, and there was a long and ugly scar across the upper part of one of his cheeks.

"Great Heaven!" cried Hubert Garson, as he sprung forward to meet the new-comers. "Has the grave opened? Am I dreaming? Or, is this man the real Percy Wyville?"

"The real and only specimen of that name, old fellow!" was the answer, as the thin hand of Percy Wyville clasped that of his representative.

"What! you were not killed?"

"Not quite, Hubert!"

A strange cry came from the lips of Dr. Wyville at this moment, calling every glance upon him.

Hardly able to maintain himself upon his feet, he was tottering toward Captain Hanson, with a face like that of a dead man.

"Who—who is this young man, Reuben?" he gasped, as he reached the side of the worthy captain, to whom he clung for support.

"He's my son-in-law, and the husband of that daisy by his side, who is Hetty Hanson, my only daughter!"

"But, who is he, Reuben?"

"He's your nephew, John—from 'way down East, a couple of bunks below Kennebunk!" answered the captain. "In other words, he's Percy Wyville!"

"What! Not dead?"

"No more so than the rest of us, so far as I can see," assured the jovial old navigator, "but I must say that he has had a narrow squeak of it! If you had struck him a little harder with that iron bar, John—"

"And the fall down the cliff did not kill him!" cried the doctor.

"No. You threw him down the wrong place, where the cliff was not half so high as you supposed and intended. Then, too, his fall was broken by a lot of bushes growing on the face of the precipice, and by a tree at the bottom!"

"Then who was killed, Reuben?"

"Nobody, John, so far as your efforts are concerned."

"Then I—I am not a murderer!" faltered the doctor.

"No, Uncle John," answered Percy Wyville, halting beside the doctor, with his wife on his arm, and offering his hand. "I can see and realize how sorry you are for your cruel assault upon me, but I can forgive you, in view of the terrible temptation presented to you."

Again the doctor broke down with the reaction of his feelings, as he shook hands with Percy heartily and then greeted his new niece.

"To be sure, uncle," added Percy; "Mrs. Levison says that you killed Mrs. Claude Wyville, but Mrs. Birdsell says that the Jewess is lying."

"The horrible creature!" cried the doctor, with such genuine surprise and honesty that Percy saw at a glance there was no truth in the accusation. "As Mrs. Birdsell can tell you, no power on earth could have saved my sister-in-law's life, and I have always taken to myself a great deal of credit for keeping her alive as long as I did. But what about the murdered man, who was run over by the cars?"

"I will soon tell you," answered Percy. "The story, as published, was cooked up between my wife's brother, a medical student, as you know, and the police. At the time of—of our little difficulty, uncle, Tom Hanson and some of his fellow students had in their possession the body of an unknown tramp who had been run over and killed, and we all resolved, the captain and the rest of us, to give you a good scare, with the aid of a little connivance on the part of the police."

The doctor still clung to the hand of his nephew, as if afraid that the change in his status and ideas was merely an illusion, and that he would soon be plunged back into the old misery.

"Of course the one guide of all our proceedings," pursued Percy Wyville, "has been a desire to keep the name of Wyville free from reproach among men, as it has been as far back as we have any records. Even if you had killed me, it is doubtful if the captain would have desired to prosecute you. But fortunately there was no occasion for us to denounce you. Crummer came to my relief almost as soon as Hubert left me, and I was carried to the captain's, where Hetty and all did everything for me."

"But, why did you allow Hubert to come and take your place?"

"Well, why shouldn't I? He had already seen and loved Nora, and I had learned to think well of him, as I do yet, in fact. As to me, I had my place with the Hansons, and I respected Hubert too much to blame him for taking my name, or to have any desire to interfere with him. I think he has behaved well under the trying circumstances in which he was placed."

Inspector Mortimer arose at this moment.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, calling attention to a letter in his hand, "I am advised by the chief of police of New York that no murder was committed at Weehawken, and that there is no occasion for me to give any further attention to that matter. I regret that Crummer did not communicate with me, so that we could have worked more in harmony, but 'all's well that ends well,' says Shakespeare, and hence, there is no occasion for sorrow. We bid you adieu!"

He drew Crummer's arm within his own and took his departure, followed not merely by his two officers, but also by Mr. Hartle and Mrs. Mawney, who had completed their mission at the doctor's.

In good truth, there was little more to be said and done.

A large portion of the money extorted from the doctor by Mrs. Levison and David Brail was duly wrested from them by process of law, and the doctor was able to hand over to his niece the million and a half of her inheritance nearly intact.

Freed from the harpies who had so long played upon him, the doctor has become cheerful, repentant, and changed, so that he is more appreciated than ever.

For a portion of the change wrought in his ideas and nature, we are indebted, we must confess, to a little Hubert Garson, who has duly set up his authority in the doctor's dwelling!

As to the marriage of Julia Wyville and Harry Fountain, and their subsequent happiness, what need is there to dwell upon it?

As to the jolly Captain Hanson, with his daughter and Percy, they have never ceased to be thankful for the captain's precautions, for they are sure that it was his watchfulness that prevented a terrible tragedy from leaving its shadow upon them.

We need only add that Inspector Mortimer is still pursuing his calling, and that Crummer stands high in his favor.

THE END.

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